

TOP 100 Our latest ranking of UK racers

AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

4 NOVEMBER 2021

F1 2021

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PLUS



- How Toyota averted **Le Mans** defeat
- The new **McRae** taking on rallying





The sound of obsession

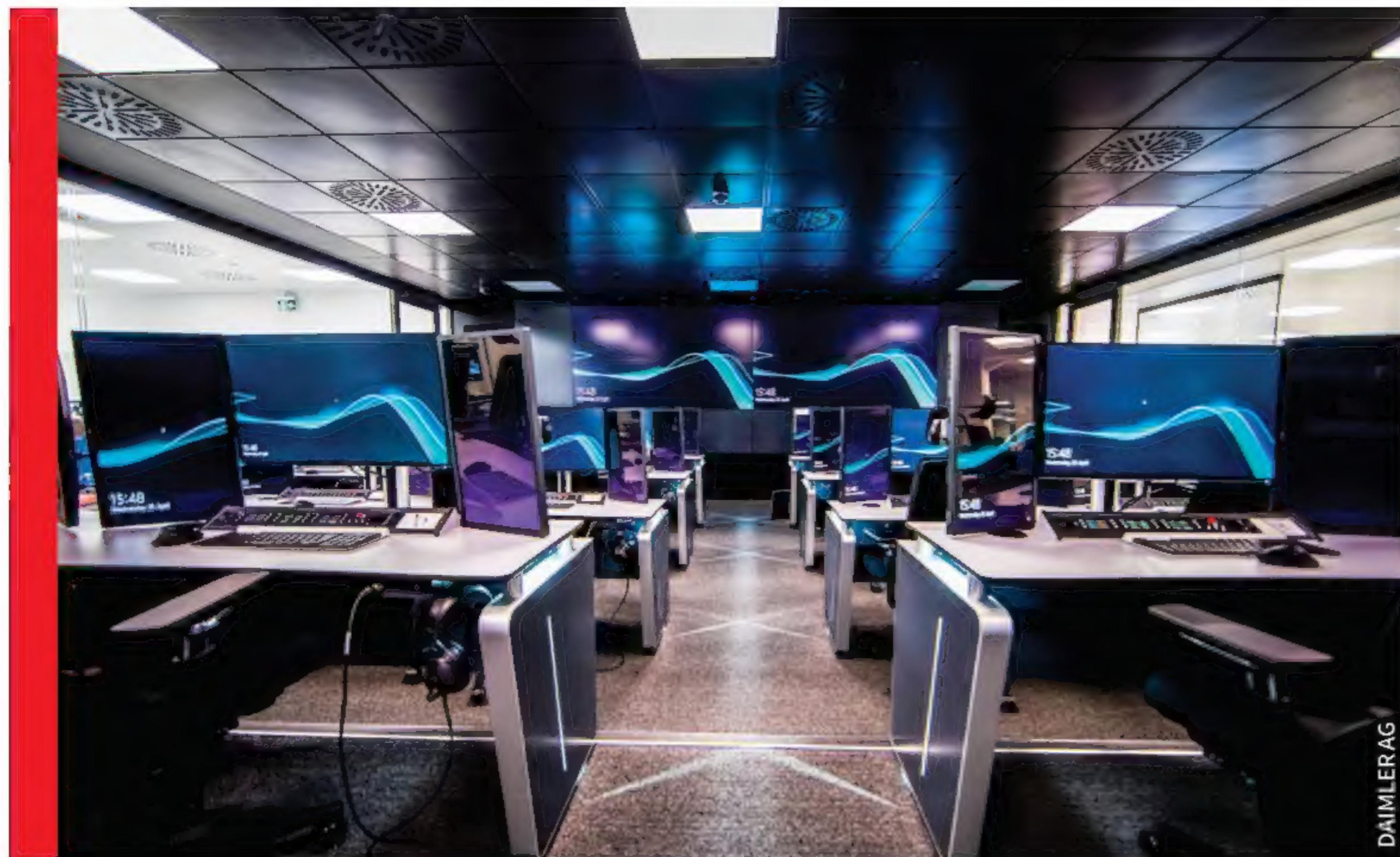
At Christopher Ward our designers are a little, well, obsessive. Take the C60 Trident Pro 600 as proof. So determined were the design team in England to get the 'click' of the rotating dive bezel just right, they secretly recorded other brands' bezels for reference. Then sent the recordings to our ingenious Swiss engineers – and told them to do their best. The result is a bezel with a click that beats all other brands, bar one: Rolex. Next time, we'll go one better.



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DAIMLERAG

Behind the scenes at one of modern F1's greatest teams

Autosport always tries to bring insights from paddocks and circuits around the motorsport world, but sometimes we have the great privilege to get access to places and people that are usually much more hidden away. And two of the stories this week fall into that category.

Our Formula 1 Reporter Luke Smith went behind the scenes at Mercedes, getting to experience some of the United States Grand Prix weekend in the Race Support Room at the multiple title-winning squad's Brackley base (page 20). Such support away from the circuit has become essential for successful F1 teams, and Smith was able to gain some fascinating insights and speak to a few of those who rarely get their time in the spotlight. They could be the people who decide the title fight between Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen.

Sportscar guru Gary Watkins was one of the few journalists to be given the in-depth explanation of Toyota's Le Mans struggles (p28). The win looked easy, but it certainly was not, requiring both ingenuity from the engineers and remarkable multi-tasking from the drivers.

Beyond those stories, we also look at two young talents. Alex Palou took IndyCar by storm this season, as David Malsher-Lopez shows in our review (p32), while Max McRae is the latest driver from the famous Scottish motorsport clan to set his sights on the World Rally Championship. He talks to Tom Howard (p38).



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MORE POINTS, MORE RACES ON CARDS FOR F1 SPRINTS

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 wants more points to be up for grabs in sprint races next year as the championship edges closer to plans to host six Saturday races in 2022.

Although only two of the three sprint qualifying trials of 2021 have taken place, with the last at this month's Brazilian Grand Prix, F1 chiefs have already seen enough to be convinced that the format is a big hit with the majority of enthusiasts. While a final decision about the 2022 plans will be made in conjunction with teams and the FIA over the winter, F1 owner Liberty Media is working on its vision for what it thinks should change.

F1 managing director of motorsport Ross Brawn has reiterated that six events is the target for 2022, with every race promoter having expressed an interest in holding one. A final decision on which races will be awarded a sprint weekend has not been made, but they are likely to be spread evenly throughout the campaign.

Amid recent suggestions of sprints becoming

standalone events, potentially with reversed grids, Brawn has made it clear that there will instead only be an evolution of the sprint rules for 2022. With uncertainty about the impact of F1's new technical rules, he thinks it sensible to wait and see how things pan out next year before changing the sprint system too much.

Brawn said there are key tweaks that will be put to teams, including a change of points system, the awarding of pole position and the name of the sprint. Speaking to selected media on Monday, he said: "We've in principle agreed with the teams that we will look towards six events for next year. There is quite a lot to get sorted before then, and our view is that we should take some progressive steps for next year but not radical steps. And that's partly because we have the new car coming along, and everyone needs to settle down with the new car coming. We need to see the impact of the car, so we've been relatively conservative and evolutionary for 2022. But we're positive about the concept and very pleased that F1 has been brave enough to try an alternative concept at three races to see how it works."

Brawn added that there are some key revisions being considered. "We're discussing with the teams how Saturday could be made a bit more challenging, a bit more engaging," he explained. "I'm very optimistic that the new cars will help, because of their ability to race each other. And what's in discussion is how can we make the rewards for a Saturday greater, so there's much more incentive to race on a Saturday in terms of points."

"Reverse grids etc, I'd be quite excited by that I must say. But I think it would be perhaps a step too far. But there's a few things which are on the table for discussion."

"The pole position on a Friday: it has clearly not been popular not [awarding the honour of] pole position for

ANDRE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Bottas won uneventful Monza sprint, but it set up a thrilling GP



Friday [qualifying]. So that's on the agenda. The naming of the [sprint qualifying] event, as we all call it a race: if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck... The naming of the event is something we want to tidy up. And then perhaps the points distribution for a Saturday could make it more challenging and inviting for drivers to race."

While F1 this year awards points for the top three sprint finishers (3-2-1), Brawn says that the system could change to as much as a third of the Grand Prix scale, which could mean points being offered as far down as the top 10. "That was the initial proposal [for 2021], which was not taken up because the feeling was that we need to see how the sprint functions first before we allocated the points," he said. "So we think that will be the starting point for the discussion."

"It's significant enough to be worth going for and it goes far enough down that people in lower positions still want to fight for it. It will have an influence on the championship – it must have and that's what we want – but not an excessive amount."

Brawn says he has few complaints about the way the sprint format has played out so far, with Saturday races hosted so far at Silverstone and Monza. "I think it's a price worth paying if Saturday is not a sort of crash-and-bang event – I'm not sure it's ever going to be," he said. "I think the overall weekend has improved so much that we would go with that."

JONATHAN NOBLE



No regrets for Davidson as he hangs up helmet

WEC

Anthony Davidson is calling time on his racing career with few regrets. Perhaps most significantly, a driver who will make his last professional race start in this weekend's World Endurance Championship finale in Bahrain with the Jota LMP2 team has come to terms with failing to win the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Davidson, who announced his retirement last Sunday, revealed he now has positive memories of the 2016 race in which the Toyota TS050 HYBRID he shared with Sébastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima lost victory with six minutes remaining as the result of an engine issue.

"It was heartbreaking at the time, one of the lowest moments of my career," he said. "I don't have the trophy at home, but in my mind I won that race in terms of the job I did. It was one of the best drives of my career: I was flying, made no mistakes and helped get us into a position to win. Kazuki was cruising, bringing it home and then there was a problem with the car. There's a sugar coating to the bitter taste it left, because I know I did such a good job."

Davidson now views winning the WEC title as a greater achievement than notching up a Le Mans victory. "I have the championship victory in 2014

[with Buemi aboard a Toyota TS040 HYBRID], and I've always said that to put a title-winning campaign together across a full season requires more skill sets than winning a single race, as big an event as Le Mans is. To be an FIA world champion is something I look back on with great pride."

Davidson also counts himself lucky to have raced in Formula 1 with Minardi, BAR-Honda and Super Aguri in the era he did. "In the 2000s we had V10 engines and a tyre war: it was brilliant," he said. "I felt I deserved more at the time, but I'm proud that I got to F1 on talent alone."

The decision to stop at the age of 42 was motivated by a desire to go out while he is still at the peak of his powers, Davidson explained: "I still believe I've got the speed and am driving as well as ever, but I didn't want to start slipping and get to the point where I wasn't fast enough. I could feel it taking more and more energy to get there as the years have gone by."

He also revealed that the COVID pandemic has resulted in him re-evaluating his priorities. "It has taught me a few lessons, that it is invaluable to be at home with your family," he explained. "I want to see my kids grow up, rather than hearing about it down the phone."

GARY WATKINS

 **P42 WEC BAHRAIN**

Alpine close to green light to race on in 2022

WEC

Alpine looks all but certain to be back on the World Endurance Championship grid next season with its grandfathered ORECA LMP1 design. Philippe Sinault, whose Signatech squad runs the Renault brand's sportscar programme, revealed that the team is close to confirming a return to the Hypercar class as it gears up for the arrival of an all-new LMDh in 2024.

"We are considering strongly to continue in the WEC next year with the current car," said Sinault. "We are all pushing in that direction." His comments follow the FIA World Motor Sport Council's decision last month to extend the racing life for one more year of

P1 machinery such as the Alpine-Gibson A480 that formerly raced as the Rebellion R-13. That extension and an intent for Alpine to continue are almost certainly related.

Sinault insisted that he couldn't confirm the programme until Alpine's entry has been accepted: the closing date for registrations for the 2022 WEC isn't until January. "We have to complete our entry dossier and submit it to the WEC committee," he said. "We will have to see if we fulfil all the requirements."

Sinault confirmed that the intent is to return with the current driver line-up of Nicolas Lapierre, Matthieu Vaxiviere and Andre Negrao.

What happens to the Alpine endurance programme



– which started in LMP2 back in 2013 in the European Le Mans Series – in the year between the end of the eligibility of the A480 and the arrival of the marque's ORECA-based LMDh isn't clear. "For sure there will be testing [with the LMDh] and a very strong development programme," said Sinault. "But we are a race team and

we have to find a way to continue racing."

Asked whether a return to P2 is possible, he replied: "It is on the table." Alpine Signatech's credits in the secondary prototype category include two titles in each of the WEC and the ELMS and three class victories at the Le Mans 24 Hours.

GARY WATKINS

All Porsche faithful could come to Ye

SPORTSCARS

Stand-out sportscar rookie Yifei Ye has landed a factory deal with Porsche for next year. The Chinese LMP2 driver's contract is with the German manufacturer's Asia Pacific arm, but the firm aim of the link-up is to put the 21-year-old in contention for an LMDh seat for 2023.

Ye, winner of the 2021 European and Asian Le Mans Series, has been announced as a Porsche Motorsport Asia Pacific-selected driver. It's a kind of factory deal once removed, but one that crucially involves funding.

The organisation's first selected driver was Alessio Picariello. He was placed with the Dempsey-Proton Porsche team in the ELMS last year and made his debuts at the Le Mans and Nurburgring 24-hour races with the marque this year.

Where Ye will race next year hasn't been decided, according to Porsche Motorsport Asia Pacific boss Alex Gibot. But the programme will be tailored to preparing him



for a potential drive in the forthcoming Porsche LMDh prototype that will race in the World Endurance Championship and the IMSA SportsCar Championship.

"When we see the potential of Yifei, the target for us has to be to get him into LMDh in 2023," explained Gibot. "We are working to give him the best environment to convince the people at the Porsche factory to have him in the LMDh from 2023."

"Having Yifei as our selected driver is super-exciting from the sporting point of view, but also on the promotional side: to have the possibility to leverage the

brand with such a local talent is amazing."

Gibot suggested that Ye's programme is likely to be in Europe because of continuing uncertainties over international travel in Asia. But he wouldn't be drawn on "which championship or category" it will be in.

Ye, who lost P2 victory with WRT at the Le Mans 24 Hours on the last lap of the race, described the deal as "a milestone in my career". "My clear goal is to enter LMDh with Porsche in 2023 and to be the first Chinese driver to win an FIA world championship and Le Mans," he said.

GARY WATKINS



Euro NASCAR Jacques Villeneuve's Euro NASCAR adventure finally featured a race win at Vallelunga last Saturday, and the 1997 F1 world champion then took a second victory on Sunday. Villeneuve, 50, overcame a five-second penalty for a jumped start to win the opener in his Academy Motorsport/Alex Caffi Motorsport Chevrolet. In the second, he made a mid-race pass on Loris Hezemans to move in front. Second place for Hezemans assured the Dutchman of the title, and he has now set his sights on part-time programmes next season with his Team Hezeberg squad in the NASCAR Cup Series and NASCAR Xfinity Series. A crash put Vittorio Ghirelli out of contention for the title, leaving Hezemans to beat Gianmarco Ercoli. **Photograph by NASCAR Whelen Euro Series/Klemen Sofric**

AF in prototype return before Ferrari project

WEC

AF Corse is returning to the prototype ranks next season ahead of its entry into the Hypercar class of the World Endurance Championship with Ferrari in 2023. But the Italian team is insisting that an LMP2 campaign straddling the WEC and the European Le Mans Series in 2022 is unconnected with the Ferrari LMH programme.

AF, which has worked with Ferrari since the mid-2000s,

will field an ORECA-Gibson 07 in the two series for long-time customer Francois Perrodo, who raced with the team in the 2015 and 2016 editions of the WEC before returning for the 2019-20 season. The Frenchman, who is well placed to seal a third GTE

Am WEC title with the team this year, is moving back to a category in which he competed with TDS Racing in 2017 and 2018-19.

"The programme is not linked to LMH at all; it is a different story," said AF boss Amato



Ferrari. "Francois is a friend and a fantastic driver and we are happy to join him in this project."

Perrodo will, however, once again have a Ferrari factory driver as one his team-mates: Nicklas Nielsen will move across from

this year's GTE Am (above) line-up with Alessio Rovera.

AF last ran a prototype in the 2019-20 WEC, when it fielded a Dallara under the Cetilar Racing banner for Roberto Lacorte.

GARY WATKINS

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Chancellor's budget awards £1m for Scottish XE bid

EXTREME E

As part of his budget statement delivered in the House of Commons last week, Chancellor Rishi Sunak pledged a £1million investment to support Scotland's bid to host an Extreme E event in 2022. Only thing is, when the championship revealed its provisional calendar for next season, the proposed race location in the Outer Hebrides was absent from the bewildering list of 12 countries for the tabled five-round campaign.

But as Extreme E co-founder Alejandro Agag told Autosport, announcing a vastly oversubscribed schedule helps him "to negotiate. We're not a charity, we're a business." In other words, he wants to

tease out the highest bidders.

The Outer Hebrides had also been in contention to replace the cancelled Brazil and Argentina events to round out the 2021 calendar, with the location for the finale now Dorset. It would have been an ideal setting in the weeks after the COP26 summit in Glasgow, which is currently in progress. After all, the United Climate Change Conference was used as the basis for Prince William to test drive an Odyssey 21 E-SUV at Knockhill earlier this year.

But Sunak and his post-COVID recovery plan has now administered a shot in the arm for Scotland's bid to get the Extreme E race finally up and running. According to a statement from the series, the investment

follows "productive discussions with the UK government, the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar [Western Isles council] and other key stakeholders over several months".

Agag said: "We are thrilled with this investment and to be exploring racing in Scotland in 2022. It will allow the conversation on electric mobility and the climate emergency to continue further, inspiring action and highlighting various solutions and mitigation strategies."

Agag intends to retain a European round on future calendars following the Island X-Prix event in Sardinia last month, with its location allowing for increased media and VIP guest appearances.

TOM HOWARD

Middleton pipped to title in dramatic finale

ITALIAN GT

Brit Stuart Middleton had to settle for second place in the Italian GT Endurance series after a thrilling final round at Monza last weekend.

Middleton and Imperiale Racing Lamborghini Huracan team-mates Alberto di Folco and Andrea Amici arrived at Monza in a three-way title battle against Audi Sport Italia trio Mattia Drudi, Lorenzo Ferrari and Riccardo Agostini and Scuderia Baldini Ferrari pair Daniel Zampieri and

Stefano Gai.

Amici led the opening stint from Zampieri and Agostini, before Middleton took over the Lambo for the middle portion of the three-hour race. He extended the lead to over 40 seconds before handing the car over to di Folco.

The Lambo was still comfortably clear of Zampieri and Drudi when light rain began to fall with just over half an hour to go. When the Audi moved up to second, Imperiale called di Folco in for wet-weather tyres, while Drudi



stayed out on slicks. Di Folco was quicker, but fell 5.8s short of the Audi at the flag, giving the title to Drudi, Agostini and Ferrari.

"I'm a bit gutted to be honest, but we gave it absolutely everything," said Middleton.



Jota plans two-car McLaren bid

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

The British Jota team is aiming to expand its GT World Challenge Europe attack for next season. The plan for the Le Mans 24 Hours class-winning team is to run a pair of McLaren 720S GT3s across Endurance and Sprint legs of the series in 2022.

The World Endurance Championship LMP2 stalwart returned to the GTWCE this year after a sabbatical in 2020 following the withdrawal of Swiss entrant R-Motorsport, whose Aston Martins it ran in 2018 and 2019. It took over the McLaren Ollie Wilkinson had raced in Britain and Europe with the Optimum Motorsport team in 2020 and is now shooting for two Pro class entries in 2022.

"We will be back, and the aim is to have two cars," said team boss Sam Hignett. "We feel we've had some strong results this year with Ollie and Ben [Barnicoat] and hope to continue with them, but it's not a done deal yet. Clearly there are economies of scale with two cars, but there are engineering benefits and it helps with your pit allocation too. It means you're not squeezed in somewhere you don't want to be."

Jota also has aspirations to return to the

European Le Mans Series, which it won under the G-Drive Racing flag in 2016. The team had been close to a comeback to the series this year. "We want to do one car in the ELMS, but only if we can do it properly with a competitive line-up," explained Hignett. "We're working on it, but it could fall over again."

Hignett stressed that the ELMS car would not go to Le Mans: "We will not run three cars at Le Mans; that would be stretching ourselves too far."

United Autosports, one of Jota's sparring partners in the WEC, is unlikely to move up into the GT3 arena for 2022 after returning to the GT ranks this year. It stated a desire to race in the higher category after announcing its comeback to the GT ranks in the GT4 European Series.

"The plan to move up to GT3 remains, but it's looking like it will be tough for next year," explained United boss Richard Dean, whose team won the 2021 European GT4 title with a McLaren. "It might look like the obvious decision to go GT3 after winning in GT4, but GT3 is so competitive and you've got to forge the right deal with a manufacturer."

GARY WATKINS

IN THE HEADLINES

KATSUTA STAYS AT TOYOTA

Toyota has retained Takamoto Katsuta to pilot its fourth car in next year's World Rally Championship. The Japanese had a strong first half of the 2021 season, with a best result of second on the Safari Rally. Katsuta will be co-driven by Aaron Johnston, who has been alongside him since last month's Rally Finland after his regular sidekick Daniel Barritt sustained neck and back injuries.

IMOLA REPLACES MONZA

The opening round of the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup will switch from Monza to Imola for next season. The Imola 3 Hours will take place on 3 April in the slot filled by Monza since the launch of the championship as the Blancpain Endurance Series in 2011, with the exception of the pandemic-affected 2020 season, when Imola kicked off the endurance leg of GTWCE in July.

CHADWICK, POWELL P2 TESTS

W Series champion Jamie Chadwick and runner-up Alice Powell will get tryouts in the Signatech-run Richard Mille Racing LMP2 ORECA-Gibson 07 in Sunday's World Endurance Championship rookie test in Bahrain. They will drive the car backed by the FIA's Women in Motorsport initiative along with Lilou Wadoux-Ducellier, who finished third in this year's Alpine Europa Cup one-make series.

LAMBO TITLE DECIDED

Karol Basz and Mattia Michelotto won both races on their way to claiming glory in the Lamborghini Super Trofeo World Finals at Misano last weekend. Michelotto led the first race from solo driver Richard Antinucci, and after the pitstops Basz kept the advantage over the American. It was a Pole on pole for race two, with Basz converting that to the lead. Michelotto took over and again headed home Antinucci. Briton Seb Morris took eighth overall, with a best result of sixth alongside Sebastian Balthasar.

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FOSTER TOPS FIRST AMERICAN TEST AT INDY

INDY PRO 2000

Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year finalist Louis Foster set the overall fastest time of post-season Indy Pro 2000 testing as he took his first step onto the Road to Indy ladder in the US.

Foster, who finished runner-up in this year's Euroformula Open rankings, topped three of the six sessions across two days on the Indianapolis road course with Exclusive Autosport.

IP2000 is the middle of the three rungs on the Road to Indy's IndyCar-supporting ladder, and Foster was joined at the test by fellow Brits Enaam Ahmed and Matt Round-Garrido. "This was my first time on this track with this team and we were just finding our feet really," said Foster (below). "I have enjoyed the last two days. It has been a good experience for me – my first proper test outside of Europe – and our pace has been strong."

Times in the senior Indy Lights category were headed by former British F3 racer Benjamin Pedersen, who was fourth in the Lights rankings this season. Other quick drivers included FIA F3 race winner Matteo Nannini with Juncos Hollinger Racing, Formula Regional Americas series leader Kyffin Simpson and newly crowned IP2000 champion Christian Rasmussen.

The 'baby' USF2000 class was topped by Jagger Jones, son of ex-Indycar racer PJ and grandson of 1963 Indy 500 winner and 1970s F1 team boss Parnelli. The 19-year-old Jones is stepping into single-seater competition after cutting his racing teeth in karts, short ovals and NASCAR.



FORMULA 3 MOTORSPORT LIMITED



Brits close in on F3 2022 seats

FORMULA 3

While Louis Foster was setting the pace in the US (see left), his fellow Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year finalists were gearing up for what could be their FIA Formula 3 Championship programmes for 2022.

The three-day post-season FIA F3 test at Valencia was ongoing as Autosport closed for press, and the field included AMABA contenders Ollie Bearman, Jonny Edgar and Zak O'Sullivan as well as 2019 Award winner Johnathan Hoggard.

While no teams have made any driver announcements for 2022, the post-season FIA F3 test traditionally offers a pretty accurate barometer of who will end up where for the following season, especially when they take part on all three days with the same squad. Italian Formula 4 champion Bearman, who also leads the German F4 standings, was doing all three days with Prema Racing. The 16-year-old is one of the four drivers in the Ferrari Driver Academy's Scouting World Final, and Autosport sources suggest it is all but a formality that he will earn a place on the FDA, which traditionally places its junior drivers with Prema. Alongside Bearman (right) at the Italian team are Red Bull Junior Jak Crawford (all three days), FDA member Arthur Leclerc (day one), and Mercedes F1 protege Paul Aron (days two and three), who finished third in the European Formula Regional standings this year.

Red Bull-backed Edgar, who had a tough rookie FIA F3 season with Carlin this year, joined Trident for the test. If he does join the Italian operation for 2022, he would

hope to emulate fellow Red Bull protege Jack Doohan, who took a big step forward with the squad in 2021 to finish as runner-up in the standings.

Meanwhile, GB3 champion O'Sullivan was on board at Carlin for the test. For the second day, the squad welcomed back its 2019 driver Logan Sargeant, who is now a Williams F1 junior.

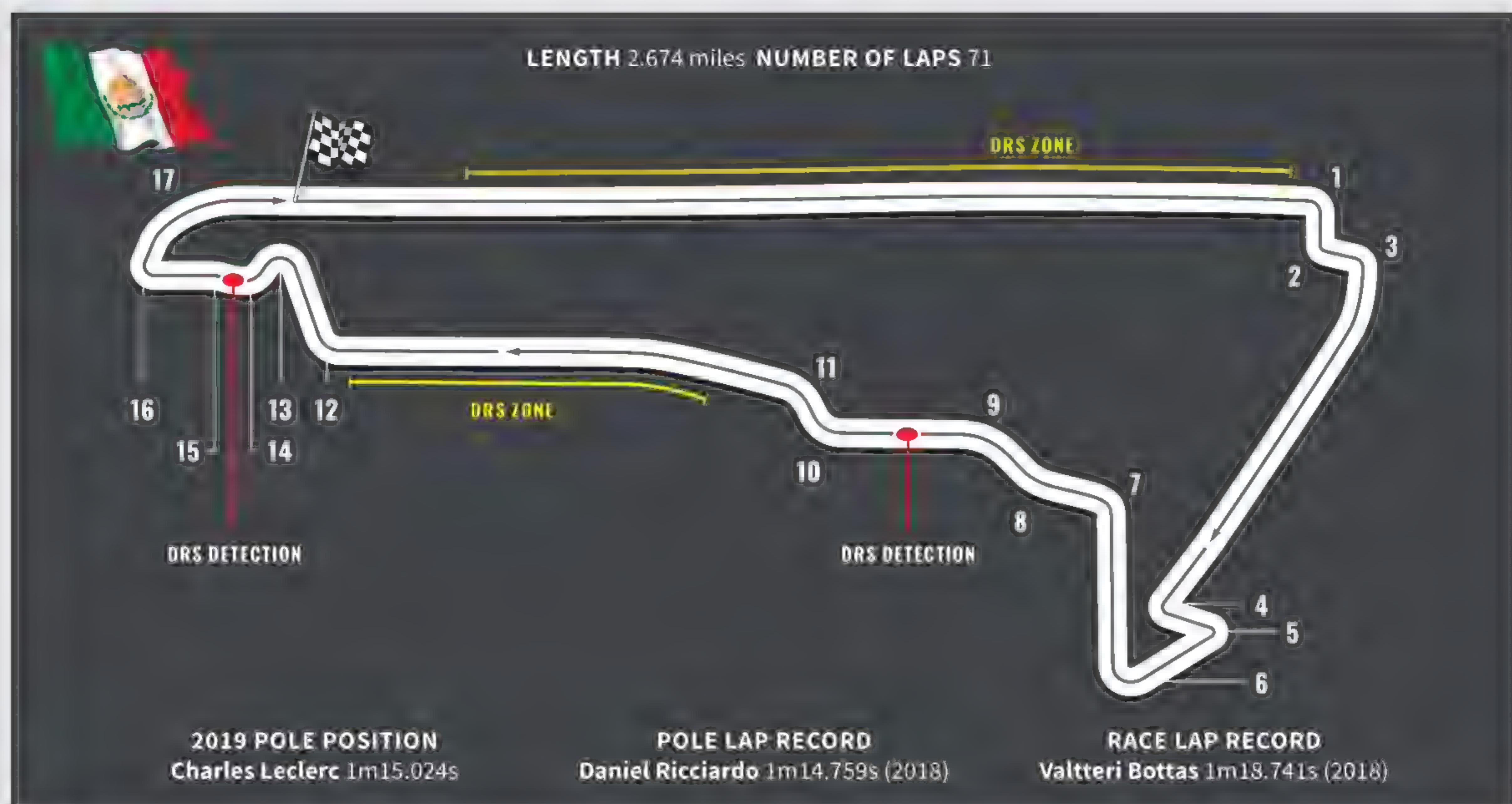
After a difficult campaign this year with Jenzer Motorsport, Hoggard was at Valencia with Hitech GP alongside 2021 Carlin driver Kaylen Frederick and FRegional ace Isack Hadjar. Other FRegional graduates included champion Gregoire Saucy at ART Grand Prix and Zane Maloney with Trident.

Doohan, who is thought to be targeting a move to F2, topped the opening day with Van Amersfoort Racing (above). The Dutch team is new to the series after taking over the entry of HWA Racelab.

MARCUS SIMMONS



F1 MEXICAN GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



UK START TIMES

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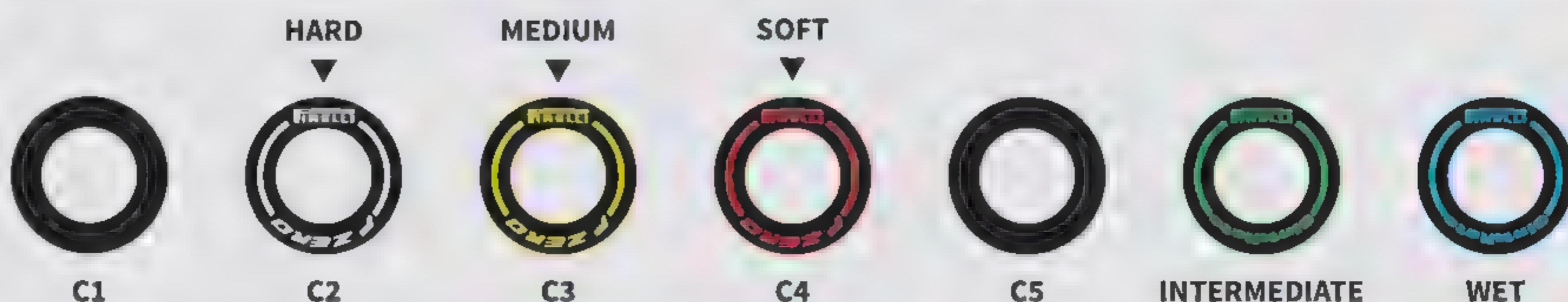
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QUALIFYING 2000

Sunday 7 November
RACE 1900

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TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1 Verstappen	287.5	1 Mercedes	460.5
2 Hamilton	275.5	2 Red Bull	437.5
3 Bottas	185	3 McLaren	254
4 Perez	150	4 Ferrari	250.5
5 Norris	149	5 Alpine	104



RACE STATS

Previous winners

2019 Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2018 Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2017 Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2016 Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2015 Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
1992 Nigel Mansell	Williams
1991 Riccardo Patrese	Williams
1990 Alain Prost	Ferrari
1989 Ayrton Senna	McLaren
1988 Alain Prost	McLaren



Best results

Hamilton	1st x 2
Verstappen	1st x 2
Vettel	2nd x 2
Bottas	2nd x 1
Raikkonen	3rd x 2
Ricciardo	3rd x 1
Leclerc	4th x 1
Ocon	5th x 1
Stroll	6th x 1
Perez	7th x 2



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A front-quarter view of a classic red sedan. The car features a black soft-top roof, a black front grille with a central emblem, and a black bumper. The front fenders have integrated headlight units. The side of the car shows four rectangular door handles. The interior is visible through the windows, showing a dark dashboard and seats. The background is a plain, light color.

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Whither the 'F1 kingmaker'?

Max Verstappen vs Lewis Hamilton: may the best man win? Not necessarily. A number of others on the grid could have a say in the world title destiny, as history shows

ROGER SMITH

As 2021's nip-and-tuck Formula 1 title battle counts down, and DNF anxieties ramp up, it's worth a glance beyond power unit reliability to anticipate the deciding factor. The Turkish Grand Prix demonstrated perfectly how a team's number two driver can deny points to a rival contender. But F1 history informs us that occasionally circumstances conspire for the 'wingman' to be the final arbiter in the crowning of a champion, relinquishing track position at the season finale and thereby donating the requisite points that guarantee the crown for their contender team-mate. Here's a reminder of F1's four kingmakers over the decades, with a certain Italian team conspicuously prominent.

F1's most celebrated kingmaker is Peter Collins, uniquely instrumental in crowning Juan Manuel Fangio in 1956 with his fourth of five titles. Famously Collins went beyond just points by donating his car to 'The Maestro' at a time when shared drives were permissible. Fangio entered the Monza season finale as firm title favourite; Ferrari team-mate Collins and Maserati's Jean Behra each with an outside chance. A car breakage forced Fangio out, whereas Collins worked himself towards a position that could have won him the race and with it the championship. Instead he handed his car over to Fangio, who duly won his fourth title. "I'm too young," stated 25 year-old Collins in explaining this extraordinary act of sportsmanship, adding: "And Fangio deserved it anyway."

"If Bottas is the 'F1 kingmaker' he'd be well advised to keep a low profile at Zandvoort in '22!"

So instead of Collins, just two years later the distinction of becoming Britain's first F1 world champion fell to close friend Mike Hawthorn. His season-long 'Battle of Britain' with Stirling Moss culminated at the Moroccan GP. They lined up side by side, Hawthorn's Ferrari on pole. Moss's only chance was to win the race and set fastest lap in his Vanwall, which is exactly what he did, leading from start to finish. Even so, Hawthorn knew that second place was enough to secure the title by a single point. The race wasn't going his way – he spent much of it running third and fourth, but help was at hand through Ferrari team-mate Phil Hill, who slowed his pace and waved Hawthorn through to second. Somewhat akin to Nico Rosberg in 2016, Hawthorn shocked the world by abruptly announcing his retirement. His health was a problem, but he was also deeply troubled by the death of close

friend Collins at the Nurburgring 10 weeks earlier. Just three months later Hawthorn too was killed, victim of a road accident.

If ever there was a kingmaker villain, it would have to be Lorenzo Bandini. At Mexico City in 1964 the Italian faced exactly the same situation as Phil Hill: wave Ferrari team-leader John Surtees through into second place to clinch the championship by one point from BRM's Graham Hill. Which is what he did on the very last lap when the leading Lotus of Jim Clark, also a contender, had its engine seize. Even then Surtees would likely have missed out if Bandini hadn't already accounted for points leader and pre-race title favourite Graham Hill by punting him off and out of third place. Hill only needed two points to become champion, and folklore has it that, the following Christmas, he sent Bandini a book on advanced driving. So in his role as kingmaker, Bandini uniquely assisted Surtees with a double-whammy!

Finally, fast-forward to 2007 and Lewis Hamilton's debut season. The rookie had led the 17-round championship from round six, and faced a finale shootout at Interlagos between himself, McLaren team-mate Fernando Alonso and Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen, who required victory to stand any hope. Hamilton didn't need to win but was quickly in trouble, finishing up seventh but adding two points to his season's tally. Up front the Ferrari pair of Felipe Massa and Raikkonen streaked away from Alonso, but the wrong driver was leading... This was a period when team orders were banned but, with a title at stake, a surreptitious switch was inevitable. A genuine mistake by leader Massa at Descida do Lago gave the subterfuge authenticity, but sure enough the predictable switcheroo took place during their second pitstops and Raikkonen was champion by a single point. That's how close Hamilton came to winning the world championship in his rookie season.

Which brings us to today's epic struggle. Valtteri Bottas's superior frontrunning record, particularly in qualifying, singles him out over Sergio Perez to line up alongside Collins, Phil Hill, Bandini and Massa as F1's fifth kingmaker. At least Bottas won't need to sacrifice a championship chance as did the altruistic Collins, or the home victory required of the amenable Massa. But his forfeit could well be a race victory, and most likely his very last.

Following the recent DTM ruckus when Mercedes' satellite entrants denied the Red Bull-backed Ferrari team the 2021 title, don't rule out other Mercedes-powered or Red Bull teams waving through one or other contender, especially the AlphaTauri drivers. Yuki Tsunoda held up Hamilton in Turkey for seven laps to assist Verstappen, and how could Red Bull deny Pierre Gasly a 2023 seat if he is the catalyst in delivering this title to Milton Keynes?

But if the role of 'F1 kingmaker' does fall to Bottas, he would be well advised to keep a very low profile on 4 September next year. That's the date scheduled for the Dutch GP at Zandvoort! *



McLaren's star across the pond

IndyCar title challenger Pato O'Ward has been compared to a young Juan Pablo Montoya – and he's all set to get his first taste of Formula 1 machinery

LUKE SMITH

The good times are back at McLaren following its first Formula 1 win for almost nine years at Monza. But there are plenty of reasons for it to be cheerful away from F1 too.

Since taking the helm at the end of 2016, McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown has expanded its racing portfolio to encompass IndyCar, Extreme E and a possible Formula E entry down the line. And it's in IndyCar where McLaren has enjoyed particular success this year. Two years on from the disaster of Fernando Alonso's failure to qualify for the Indianapolis 500, the Arrow McLaren SP squad, which McLaren Racing is set to have a 75% stake in, mounted a challenge for the title this year, led by young gun Pato O'Ward.

Mexican O'Ward won the Indy Lights title in 2018, which was followed by a brief stint as a Red Bull junior in FIA Formula 2 and Super Formula before he returned to the United States to embark on his first full IndyCar season in 2020 with McLaren. Four podiums and a pole at Road America led him to fourth in the championship last year, staking his claim as one of IndyCar's burgeoning talents.

Having made a promise to Daniel Ricciardo over his first F1 podium with McLaren, Brown also made a proposition to O'Ward: win an IndyCar race, and you'll get an F1 test at the end of the year in Abu Dhabi. Victory at Texas Motor Speedway in

“Every kid grows up with the same dream, and that same dream is always F1”

early May meant O'Ward had that in the bag, with a second win in Detroit six weeks later only pressing home the issue. It vaulted him into contention for the championship, leading to a final-race showdown at Long Beach against Alex Palou that he ultimately lost, ending the year third in the standings.

The opportunity to test current F1 machinery is rare given the existing limitations, making Abu Dhabi a golden chance for O'Ward. It will be a different beast to what he has driven in IndyCar given the levels of downforce, particularly with the cornering speeds.

“The next month is going to be a lot of neck work for me,” he says. “The F1 car is a faster, more-grip kind of machine [than IndyCar] so they're very different. But I'm looking forward to it. I'm pumped.”

O'Ward has a decent pool of contacts to tap into for advice. He went for dinner with Lando Norris while he was in the UK, and he also plans to speak to Romain Grosjean for tips, having struck up a good relationship with the ex-Haas F1 driver during his rookie IndyCar season.

McLaren is the only F1 team that can afford such an opportunity to its drivers thanks to its programmes either side of the Atlantic. Understandably, it has O'Ward dreaming big: could he possibly make the switch from IndyCar to F1 one day?

O'Ward admits he would “be lying” if it wasn’t on his mind going into the test. “Every kid grows up with the same dream, and that same dream is always F1 – and if they say it was something else, it’s a lie,” he says. “Right now I’m so focused on doing the most perfect job that I can in IndyCar. I want to give this team the championship that they deserve. I want to give them a 500. And in the future, if it’s something that fits with both of us, of course I’d take a drive in Formula 1.

“Because... it’s Formula 1, man! It’s the top of the top in terms of technology and they are the fastest race cars in the world. I feel like there’s nothing more to say!”

O'Ward has been compared by Brown to a young Juan Pablo Montoya – this is something O'Ward calls “a very big compliment”, adding, “Fucking Montoya is a legend!” – who made the move from Indycars to F1 for 2001.

The Colombian still stands as the most recent driver to make the switch successfully.

But Brown is eager to ensure there is not too much pressure placed on O'Ward going into his F1 test. “His preparation – he’s been in the simulator – has been very good,” Brown says. “I think it’s important we don’t put too much pressure on him and we’ll see how he gets on. I think he will enjoy it.”

But whatever he does down the line, O'Ward vows to give it his all. “Maybe I stay in IndyCar for the rest of my career, or maybe I come in a couple of years to Formula 1...” he ponders. “Like I tell everybody, it wouldn’t be just to experience it. If I do the switch, I’m coming to win and compete, just like I told everybody in IndyCar.

“I’m too competitive just to be like, ‘Oh, it’s cool’. No, I want to be one of the top dogs in anything that I’m doing, because that’s just the nature of me and the nature of the team.”

Abu Dhabi will be an important moment for O'Ward. Even if it’s a one-off, he’ll fulfil a lifelong dream of driving an F1 car. But if his progression in IndyCar is anything to go by, and fuelled by his hunger, passion and personality, maybe it could be the start of something bigger. **»**

 **PIT + PADDOCK SEASON REVIEW**

YOUR SAY

I can still hear Raymond Baxter's voice, imparting the sad news on black and white TV that Sunday afternoon

DAVID TREMAYNE

Story of Siffert's accident stirs more memories

Regarding Neil Salisbury's letter last week on the subject of Jo Siffert's fatal accident at Brands Hatch in October 1971, I have to say that I agree with his assessment.

The late Tim Parnell told me in 1991 that Seppi and Ronnie Peterson collided on the first lap after Seppi made a poor getaway, and our late and much-missed buddy Alan Henry said, "I was there and it was one hell of a bump exiting Graham Hill Bend. They had all four wheels off the road."

Tim always believed that the collision, Ronnie's right front to Seppi's left rear, damaged the BRM's left rear radius arm, which later broke going into Hawthorns. He also said that he later received a letter from "a spiritualist who said something broke behind Seppi's left shoulder. And that's exactly what did happen. It was spooky. He hit the bank, the car rolled over in flames and he died through lack of oxygen. His only injury was a fractured ankle."

Talking with Emerson Fittipaldi many years later, he told me how when everyone came to a halt at Hawthorns he immediately jumped out of his Lotus. "I was just so determined to get him out of that burning car. I was in triple-layer Nomex overalls, with gloves, helmet and balaclava," he said, the pain still evident in his voice after all that time, "but the heat was so intense that I couldn't get anywhere near the accident."

I can still hear Raymond Baxter's voice, imparting the sad news on black and white TV that Sunday afternoon.

David Tremayne
Darlington, County Durham

Hunt versus Lauda – at Donington Park

I was a little surprised not to see any coverage of the epic Hunt versus Lauda battle in the magnificent Sports Prototype Cup at Donington Park. I was honoured to be part of the racing and delighted to stand on the podium spraying champagne with the esteemed duo.

The Revolution A-One is a mighty car that punches well above its weight and Phil Abbott and family should be rightly proud of what they have created.



Marcus Pye may have rightly described me as the mercurial Graham Ridgway in Autosport pages of old, but on this outing it all came together.

To spend time with Mathias Lauda and Freddie Hunt and the ever-friendly Sir Chris Hoy in the race truck comparing data and video will be a memory to recount for ever more.

Graham Ridgway
By email

Time to give 'maiden' the elbow?

Racing commentators should cease using the word 'maiden' to describe a driver's first podium or victory. I read that Abbi Pulling earned her maiden podium in the W Series, but isn't every podium by a woman driver a maiden? I have also read about male drivers earning a maiden podium, which can sound ridiculous if you give it a moment's thought. The problem is that the term is gender-specific. First podium says it better.

Patrick Frank
Venice, California

HAVE YOUR SAY, GET IN TOUCH

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How the National Centre for Motorsport Engineering is offering students unique opportunities

Not every student on a motorsport engineering course can say that they have helped to run a historic Formula 1 car that was raced by ex-F1 driver Johnny Herbert. But that is just one of the opportunities that Emily Platt has been able to take advantage of during her time studying at the UK's only National Centre for Motorsport Engineering (NCME) at the University of Bolton.

Platt initially completed an automotive performance engineering course with the university and is now studying for a Masters. And one of the plethora of extra-curricular activities she has been able to get involved in was being part of a group of students running the 1981 Ensign N180B F1 machine.

"It was a fantastic learning experience, something I'd never done before," says Platt. "I was a front-end mechanic but had a lot of support

from other students and Pete Thundercliffe, the technician at uni."

The Centre's students were able to get involved in the project through former Force India F1 chief Bob Fernley, who ran the car for Jim Crawford in period. "We're very fortunate to have the car donated by Bob Fernley," explains the NCME director Mark Busfield. "Jim Crawford

drove the N180B and he was a Boltonian [having moved from Scotland as a child] and so Bob wanted to bring the car back to Bolton.

"The whole purpose was to understand how and why ground-effect cars work. We've scanned the car digitally so we can do a lot of CFD work. One group of students is looking at the science side of it and the others

complete preparation of the car to a high standard, so much so this year we successfully won both F1 races at the Silverstone Classic and achieved pole position."

This is just one example of how Platt has been able to bolster her theoretical academic work with practical hands-on experience through the university. She has also been able to undertake an internship working within the British Touring Car Championship.

"I did some work with them in 2019, before the pandemic, and fell in love with that," she says. "I looked after the data from accidents – it was very interesting to look into that side of it and, with doing different job roles, I get to see the full world of motorsport. I've been watching motorsports since I was little and it was only when I got involved I fully realised the depth and safety precautions involved."





"This past year I've started looking after the onboard footage in the BTCC and I get into the scrutineering bay there whenever I can. It's all about getting your face and name known. Motorsport has such a small group of people involved, you really need to make that impression as a student. The skills you learn out in the field are vital in terms of bringing them back into the classroom."

To follow in Platt's footsteps and find out more about the variety of courses available at the National Centre for Motorsport Engineering at the University of Bolton:

bolton.ac.uk/explore-our-schools/national-centre-for-motorsport-engineering

WHAT THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR MOTOSPORT ENGINEERING IS ALL ABOUT

Offering an academic qualification alongside a wealth of opportunities for students to broaden their understanding is the ethos that underpins the £13 Million state-of-the-art National Centre for Motorsport Engineering facility. Its director Mark Busfield (right) has held a variety of roles in motorsport – including project and team manager of the successful RML-run Chevrolet World Touring Car team in the 2000s and Nissan British Touring Carsquad in the 1990s – but was sometimes disappointed by the lack of engagement and hands-on practical skills that graduates had when joining his teams, so is making sure the same cannot be said of the NCME students.

"We have bespoke courses created to underpin the motorsport industry needs, and a number of internship options with our partner organisations in BTCC, British GT and other disciplines we feed students into," he explains. "It could be with a touring car team, and the student would have to commit to doing a full season programme, plus going to the partner's workshop and helping also with winter testing."

Undertaking such an in-depth opportunity would therefore ensure the Centre's students are fully equipped for the world of employment and it works well for the teams involved, too.

"We have been successfully working now

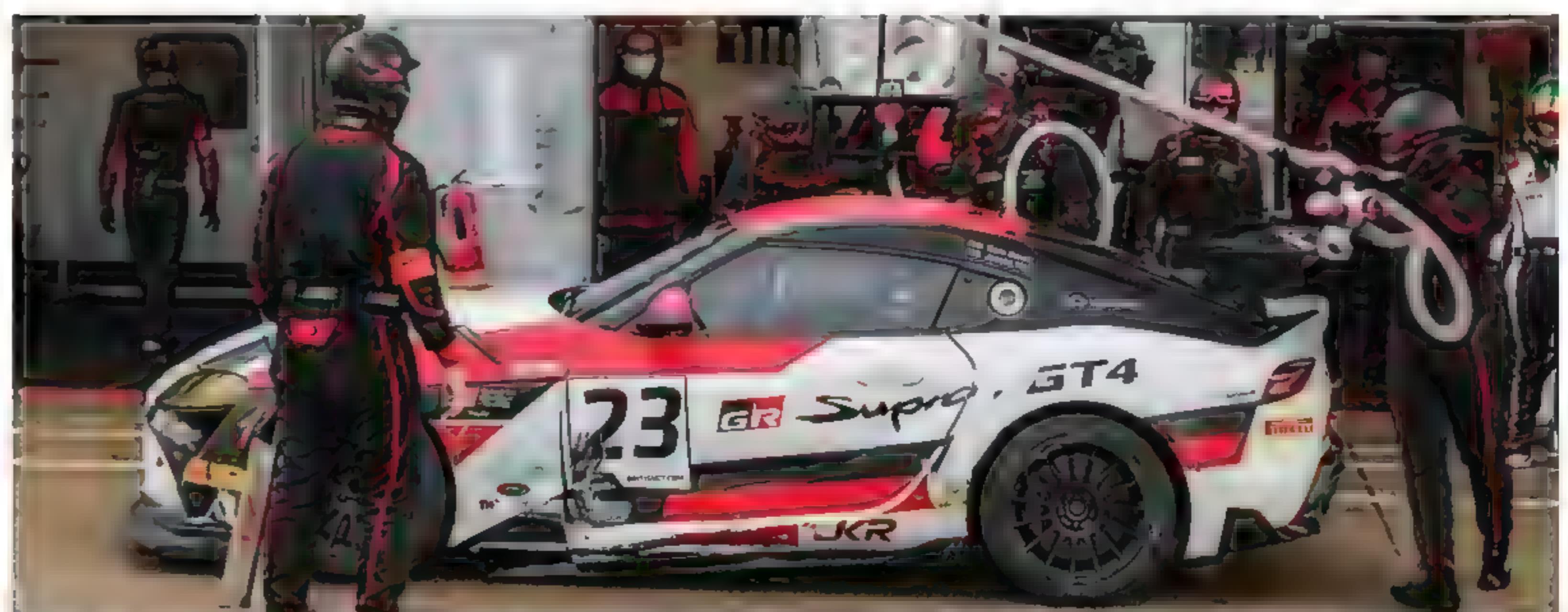


with the National Centre for Motorsport Engineering at the University of Bolton for four years," says Christian Dick, boss of the Speedworks Toyota Gazoo BTCC and British GT team. "We have some great interaction from their students working on our race programmes and also used the university to assist with engineering projects, like making a 3D print of a complete dash

panel and manufacturing a pedal box crash structure. Some students have really developed well and shone, Callum Taylor has been with us for four years and found his niche with data analysis."

Busfield adds that all the courses on offer have been developed alongside industry partners to ensure they are as relevant as possible. "We've just launched a whole new MSc in Electric Vehicles because everyone needs to know about EVs," he says. "In engineering, it never stays still – we're constantly renewing our apparatus and equipment to make sure it's up-to-date."

That is despite the Centre only opening four years ago but, such is the relentless pace of motorsport, already tools have been replaced to ensure the best facilities are available for students. Recruiting experienced staff is key too, with long-time Sauber Formula 1 aerodynamicist Willem Toet recently increasing his role. "We don't sit on our laurels, we're always looking to change things," Busfield concludes.



Initially, Platt had not planned on going down the academic route having originally intended to complete an apprenticeship. However, a visit to the Centre in Bolton completely changed her mind.

"I came for a look round and walked in the door and fell in love with the place," she recalls. "The facilities the university has got are very good and I really liked the idea of getting involved

with projects from the get-go. But also the passion from the staff and technicians. They've got experience in motorsport and in industry and were feeding all that back into the uni."

And Platt is certain she made the right decision, encouraging anyone with an interest in motorsport engineering to look at studying with the University of Bolton. "On the open day, and when you walk through the

doors on day one, they're looking to make you as employable as possible," she says. "They put a lot of time and effort in to make you the best candidate for a job role. The lecturers really look after you as students – you're not just a number on a spreadsheet. It's not just getting that paper at the end saying I got that degree, but also you get so many years of experience in different job roles."

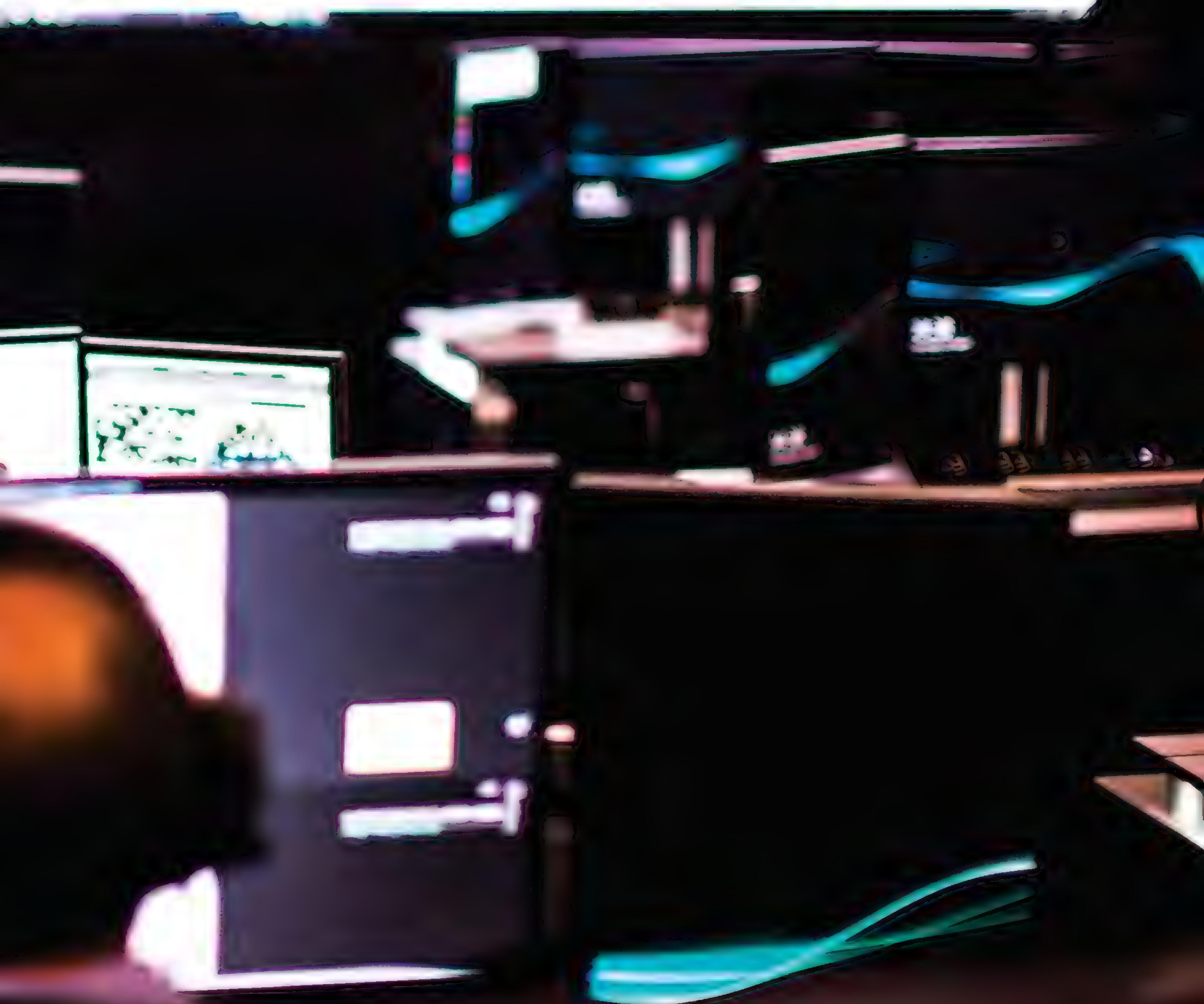
INSIDE MERCEDES F1 MISSION CONTROL

Thousands of miles from the race track, an F1 team's nerve centre shapes its drivers' fortunes. For Austin, we took an exclusive peak behind the curtain

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY MERCEDES AND  motorsport
IMAGES





“RADIO CHECK”

Two simple words and a crackle on the intercoms mark the start of an important day for Mercedes. It is the Saturday of the United States Grand Prix, and final practice is about to begin at the Circuit of The Americas. Lewis Hamilton trails Max Verstappen by six points at the top of the championship, making qualifying later in the day an important session as Mercedes looks to turn the tide in the title race.

As the radio channels fire up and the final preparations are made in the Mercedes garage, 4800 miles away in Brackley a team of strategists and engineers are also getting ready for practice. They may not be physically beside their colleagues in Austin, but they are ready to play a critical role that will be decisive to the outcome of the race.

The heart of Mercedes’ race weekend operations is the Race Support Room (RSR) at its factory, acting as ‘mission control’ for the team. It is from here that the numbers will be crunched, data will be analysed and plans will be formulated for the pitwall to then execute.

“It’s part of the team now,” says Andrew Shovlin, Mercedes’ trackside engineering director. “While everyone is separate, it doesn’t really matter anymore where anyone is sat. You get the same communication, the same data coming at you. There’s really not a lot that you’re missing back there. We’ve probably got as much going on there as we have at the track.”

Calls that could win or lose races will originate from this room. The voices you hear on the radio may be the trackside race engineers or senior officials taking the final decision, but everything will be based off data analysed back in the RSR.

Understandably, access to the RSR during live sessions is incredibly



strict. But for FP3 and qualifying in Austin, Autosport is afforded rare behind-the-scenes access to sit with the engineers and staff in the room, listening in to all of the radio communications as Hamilton and team-mate Valtteri Bottas go in search of pole position.

This is what life is like inside Mercedes’ F1 mission control.

Mercedes entered Saturday at COTA on the back foot against Red Bull. After Bottas finished almost one second clear of Verstappen in FP1, second practice was less encouraging, with Hamilton feeling the team took a couple of steps back. Final practice is therefore vital to understand why things slipped and to improve for qualifying.

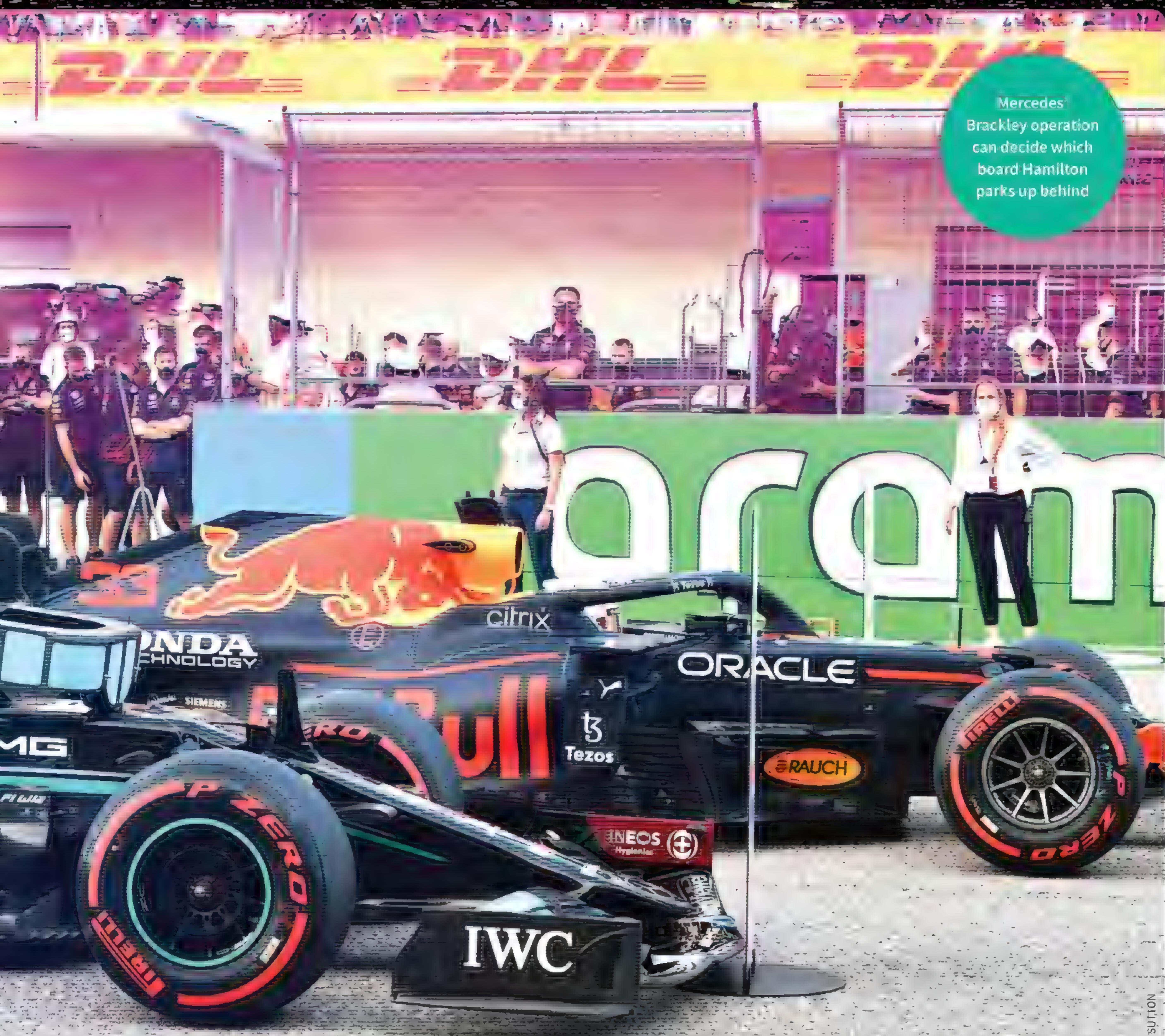


The engineers and strategists working in the RSR are already in their seats when the session goes green. The room features five rows of around six desks, all kitted out with monitors, radio buttons and headphones, ensuring that communication between the RSR, those in the garage, the pitcrews (“red crew” for Hamilton, “blue crew” for Bottas), the pitwall and, of course, the drivers can run seamlessly.

At the front of the room are a number of larger screens featuring an array of data channels. These include the TV world feeds, onboard cameras for each Mercedes, and weather radars with various ranges. There is also a graphic of the track showing the live position of each car and the gap to the car ahead, a critical tool to assess traffic and help find gaps to drop into.

Typically there would be 30 people in the RSR for each session, but this has dropped to around 15 since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement for social distancing. Nevertheless, it remains a powerful hub of knowledge for Mercedes.

One of the key figures in the RSR is Joseph McMillan, who is a senior race strategy engineer. He is part of a five-person team working on



SUTTON

strategy for Mercedes, all feeding into James Vowles, the team's motorsport strategy director. Vowles is the only member of the strategy team at the track, proving how much work can be done at the RSR.

"I love working at the RSR," says McMillan. "Especially in COVID times, with so many more meetings happening on intercoms and on Teams, and fewer face-to-face catch-ups and conversations in cars and over breakfast taking place, the benefits of being at the track are even lower than they used to be."

"When it's raining is one of the times when I'm constantly saying: 'How's the rain?' That's one of the few times that it's more useful, slightly, to be at the track. And there'll always be people who need to touch the car."

There is an established chain of command between the RSR and the pitwall, ensuring that all decisions go through required processes and get the approvals they need while avoiding information overload. The man at the top of the pyramid, of course, is team principal Toto Wolff.

"There is a great group of people in Brackley who obviously have all of the tools and maths behind everything," Wolff says. "That is being discussed on the strategy channel between the Brackley base and James, and the pitwall and myself."

"I LOVE WORKING AT THE RSR. ESPECIALLY NOW, THE BENEFITS OF BEING AT THE TRACK ARE LOWER"

"It's brainstorming and I'm very involved in the decision-making process. James runs his strategy thinking past me, and I would only give the feedback that I have because I have more bandwidth. I'm not looking at the specific data channel, but I'm able to look at the intercom, the audio messaging from the other team and obviously how the race pans out."

All of the main Mercedes race departments are represented in the RSR. Some, such as strategy, are weighted more towards the RSR, while others, such as trackside engineering, naturally have more people on site. But the seamless nature of the operation means sometimes it is not noticeable whether someone is at the track or not.

"Lewis was once talking about switching settings with his controls engineer," recalls Dom Riefstahl, the race support team leader. "The >>

engineer, Marcelo, was going through it, saying, 'Do this, then do that, and you'll come back.' The driver is like, 'Mate, just come and show me!' And Marcelo said, 'I can't, I'm sat in the RSR! I'm 5000km away, you're on your own!' In that case, somebody at the track will go and help out. But it just shows how integrated the room is to the track, because they will regularly forget."

"The audio on those intercoms is very, very good," adds Shovlin. "It's quite easy to talk to people, because you can almost hear within the tone of their voice any stress or anything. Any of us could do our job from there as easily as we can from the track, and over time that

"WE'RE LIMITED TO 60 PEOPLE AT THE TRACK, SO THE REALITY IS WE CAN'T HAVE EVERYONE HERE"

function has gone from being a 'nice to have' where we'll do the odd bit of work, to just being a huge chunk of the stuff that has to get done.

"Because we're limited to 60 people at the track, the reality is we can't have everyone here. There aren't enough passes. So you've got to work on these remote functions."

The enhanced significance of the RSR means that it is becoming an increasingly influential part of Mercedes' weekends, proving make-or-break for races. Riefstahl says that race-winning decisions coming from the remote operations used to be "rare, like one a season", but all of that has changed. "Pretty much the whole strategy is now done in the RSR, and then brought to the track, and they sanction it off," he says. "Our role is increasing massively in that respect."

One example came at the Spanish GP in May, when a decision to convert Hamilton to a two-stop strategy won him the race thanks to a late pass on Verstappen with seven laps remaining. It was a call that came from the RSR after the strategists ran the numbers and worked out that it was possible to make up the time for the additional pitstop.

"When we converted to a two-stop, we said, 'James, we should two-stop,'" says McMillan. "I've done the maths, here's the plan, here's what



THE UNI STUDENTS AT THE HEART OF MERCEDES' F1 OPERATIONS

One of the largest and perhaps more surprising contingents within the RSR is university students, who volunteer to work on race weekends as part of their placements with Mercedes' F1 team.

It gives them the opportunity to gain live experience as part of the race team, carrying out jobs such as transcribing publicly available radio from other teams or analysing video from the world feed, screenshotting interesting pieces of information or things they have noticed. For Mercedes, it ensures all bases are covered, harnessing the additional resource to hear and watch everything.

"Listening to literally 20 car feeds' worth of people talking, you just need ears to monitor

all of the TV feeds, you need eyes on the ground," says Dom Riefstahl. "It's just having that manpower. They can listen to the meetings, to the debriefs, to all of the discussions that are happening around the car."

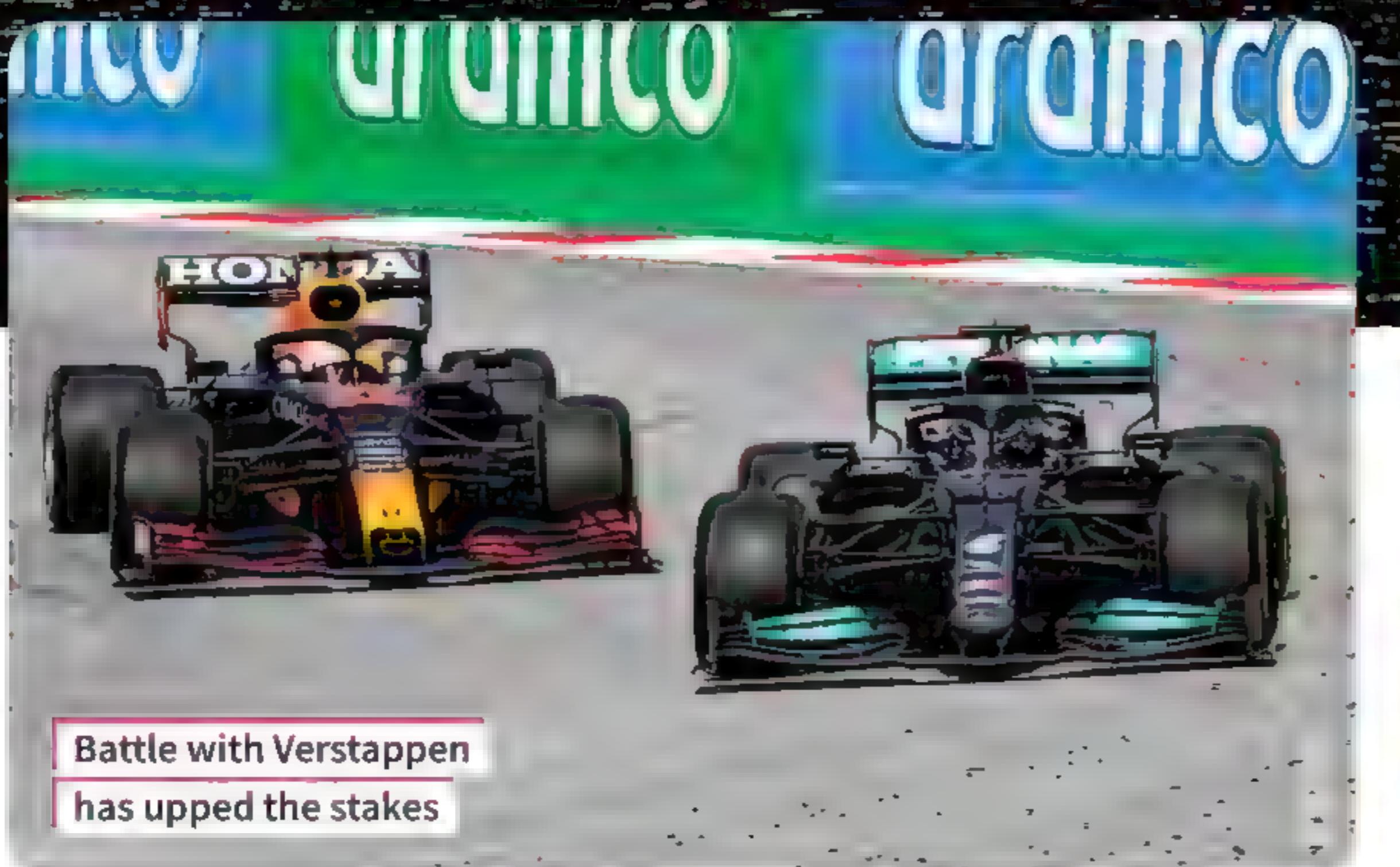
It is also helping to encourage the next generation of F1 strategists and engineers. Toto Wolff has regularly noted how the Mercedes factory in Brackley feels more and more like a university campus, and this is part of it. Riefstahl holds a 'Racing 101' session with the students on Sunday mornings ahead of the race where nothing is considered a stupid question, allowing them to raise any queries they may have.

"It just nurtures their passion for it," Riefstahl

says. "It's very informal, but they get to ask all of the things that they really want to know about, and you can really see that gets the juices flowing.

"Yes, the work in the RSR is hard work, I can't lie about it. They're really busy during the sessions. But I think that side and then being able to be present to all of the meetings is really the thank you for the work they have put in, and they really do feel involved."

"If it's a weekend where the strategy was key, and we know that the strategy was dominated by what we also heard other teams were planning on doing, and we've reacted to it and we've reacted correctly to it, then you know, yes, what I did was really important."



One stop or two? When it's in doubt the RSR comes into its own to make a call



it will look like, we should do this.' And he looked at it and went, 'Yep, you're right.' He did it, and we won the race."

While drivers will start the race with an anticipated strategy, radio messages are regularly thrown back and forth, making small tweaks depending on conditions and the data that is being constantly analysed in the RSR. "We're looking at lap times and lap data a lot of the time, looking for the situations that we've discussed the night before," says McMillan. "We're trying to make sure our models are all prepped with accurate pace, accurate tyre curves, listening a bit to the radio comms of all the other drivers, seeing if they're saying anything interesting. A surprising amount of time is spent working out what you'd do if a safety car came out.

"There's normally one guy looking at pace, one guy looking at tyres, one guy looking at safety cars, and then I'll be looking at the overarching picture, shadowing the pitwall and James, and making sure no one is missing anything."

The RSR has similarities to a NASA-style mission control, and the atmosphere itself remains very calm and focused throughout, even in big moments. Orders aren't barked, voices are never raised. Everyone is simply sitting and doing their job, communicating calmly via their headsets and staying focused on the task. There may be the odd cheer or reaction to a great overtaking move or impressive lap time – McMillan says more from the placement students – but the atmosphere you feel when taking off the headset as everyone else is hard at work is like doing so at a silent disco: everyone is in their own world.

"But what are you expecting?" responds Riefstahl, laughing. "We're not running around like a bunch of headless chickens. We all have our role. It doesn't change whether it goes well or not so well in the race. The discussions are all held in a gentlemanly manner; even if we disagree on something, we'll just be having a discussion of facts."

"There are no highs or lows in terms of emotions in there. We're just doing our job, effectively. But you do notice when there's an overtaking manoeuvre going on or something like that, and people start clapping or cheering."

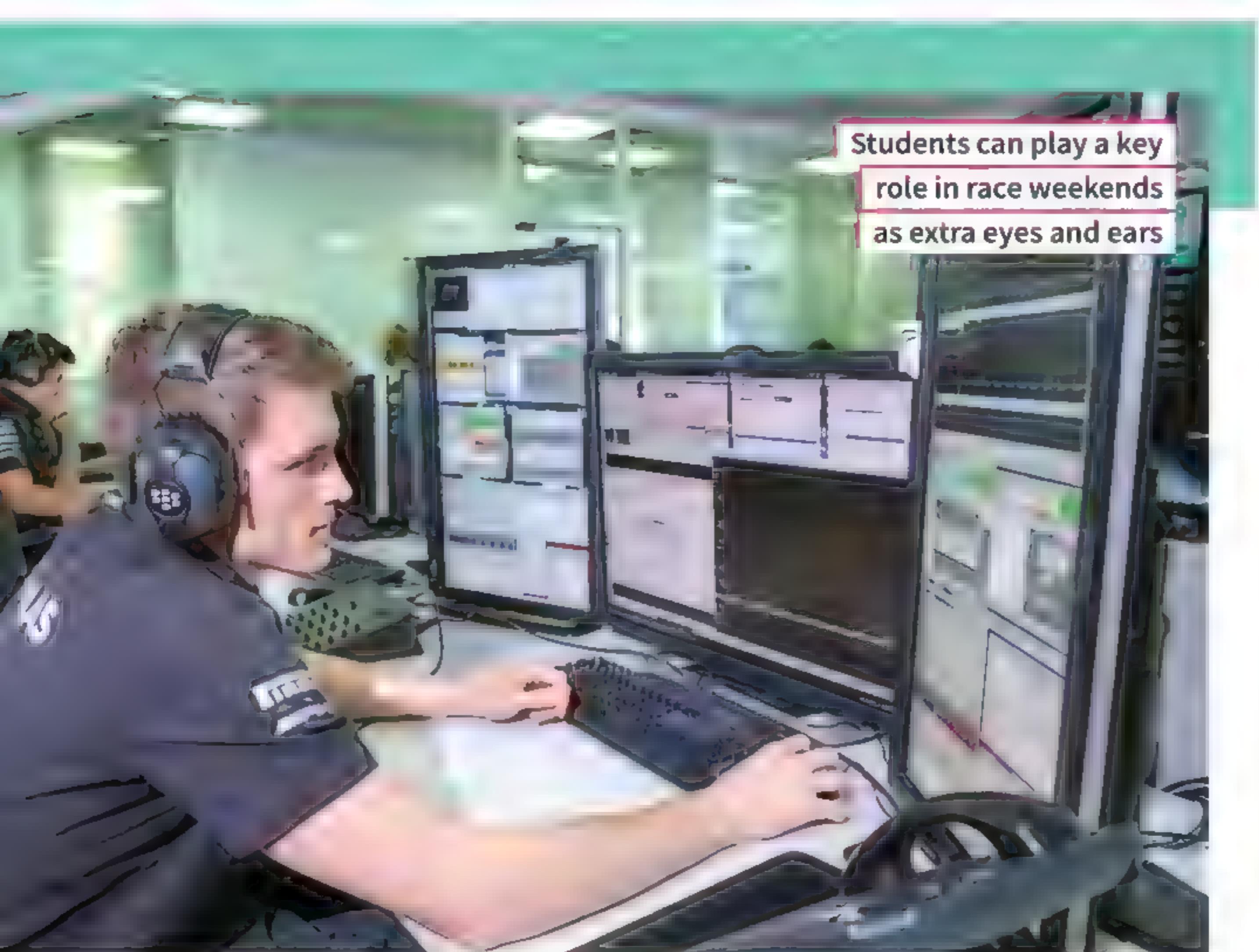
This level of serenity is also clear in the communications with the drivers throughout the session. While the radio channels are available for broadcast while drivers are out on track, the moment they return to the pits and the car is plugged in via its 'umbilical cord', radio transmissions become private.

It is at this point when the Mercedes engineers can properly dive into the data with Hamilton and Bottas, explaining which corners they are gaining or losing time at compared to the opposition, and when the drivers can give their honest feedback.

Through final practice in Austin, Hamilton is regularly asking about the gap to Red Bull – Verstappen in particular – and going through all of the data on the screens in front of him. The rear end of his Mercedes W12 has been causing trouble since FP2, prompting him to ask for various tweaks to be made before the cars get locked in for qualifying.

Contrary to some of the opinions about Hamilton's radio etiquette after the Turkish GP, his radio transmissions are deeply courteous, calling everyone "mate" and regularly getting updates. Bottas's messages are slightly less frequent, but still packed with detail. Both drivers are incredibly grateful for the work of the men and women in the RSR, >>

Students can play a key role in race weekends as extra eyes and ears





understanding the importance and significance of their operations.

"The RSR is so important for the team and how we function through a weekend," says Hamilton. "When we do our big comms meetings, the RSR team are on the other line listening in and we are just one big team.

"The guys in the RSR back at the factory are doing a huge amount of simulation, preparation, finding answers, downloading information and understanding that information so we can make the right choices on a weekend. They are an extension to what we do at the track as we have limited numbers and are integral to us achieving our goal, which is winning races."

"The RSR at the factory is super-important," adds Bottas. "We have a lot of members in the team and only a fraction can make it to the races, so we effectively have another team at the factory supporting us."

"Nowadays the amount of data we get from the car, both in terms of our driving but also how the car is set up, is huge and, with limited time in a packed schedule on a race weekend, there's no chance of us analysing it all at the track. So the support crew do an incredible job for us and nowadays you couldn't win without them."

The mental capacity of the drivers is astounding. They can comfortably deliver a corner-by-corner breakdown of where things were good or bad, and know immediately what changes they need.

At one point, Hamilton notes to his engineer Pete Bonnington that they need to come up with a code for a bit of information he wanted to relay mid-session but had to wait until he returned to the garage to provide.

"Particularly when you've got drivers with that level of experience, then there's a lot of feedback," says Shovlin. "But the tricky bit with qualifying is you're trying to bring so many things together, ultimately to get one lap right or a couple of laps right. And there's almost more than you can

contemplate, trying to control all at the same time, and there isn't a lot of time to do it."

"Qualifying is by far the most stressful point of the weekend, much more than the racing. The racing, you've got a bit more time to think about stuff, whereas quali all happens quite rapidly."

But when the qualifying laps commence, after a final call of "strat two, and you're good to go" from the race engineers to their respective drivers, total silence descends upon the radio channels. It is the critical moment of the weekend where the drivers are left in the zone, a flow state, wringing every last bit of time they can out of the car. "It's entirely down to them at that point," says Shovlin. "We're just busy watching the GPS coming in, looking at where they were up or down, but ultimately you can't do much about it."

In Austin, it's not quite enough. Hamilton qualifies second, two tenths off Verstappen. "Sorry guys," comes the radio call as the seven-time world champion parks up behind the P2 board, but Bonnington is reassuring: "We can do something from there, definitely."

The mood back at Brackley is also optimistic. Hamilton has the inside line for the run to Turn 1, and has a better remaining tyre allocation than Sergio Perez behind. With a nailed-on two-stop race at a track where overtaking is possible, there will be a number of chances to beat Verstappen.

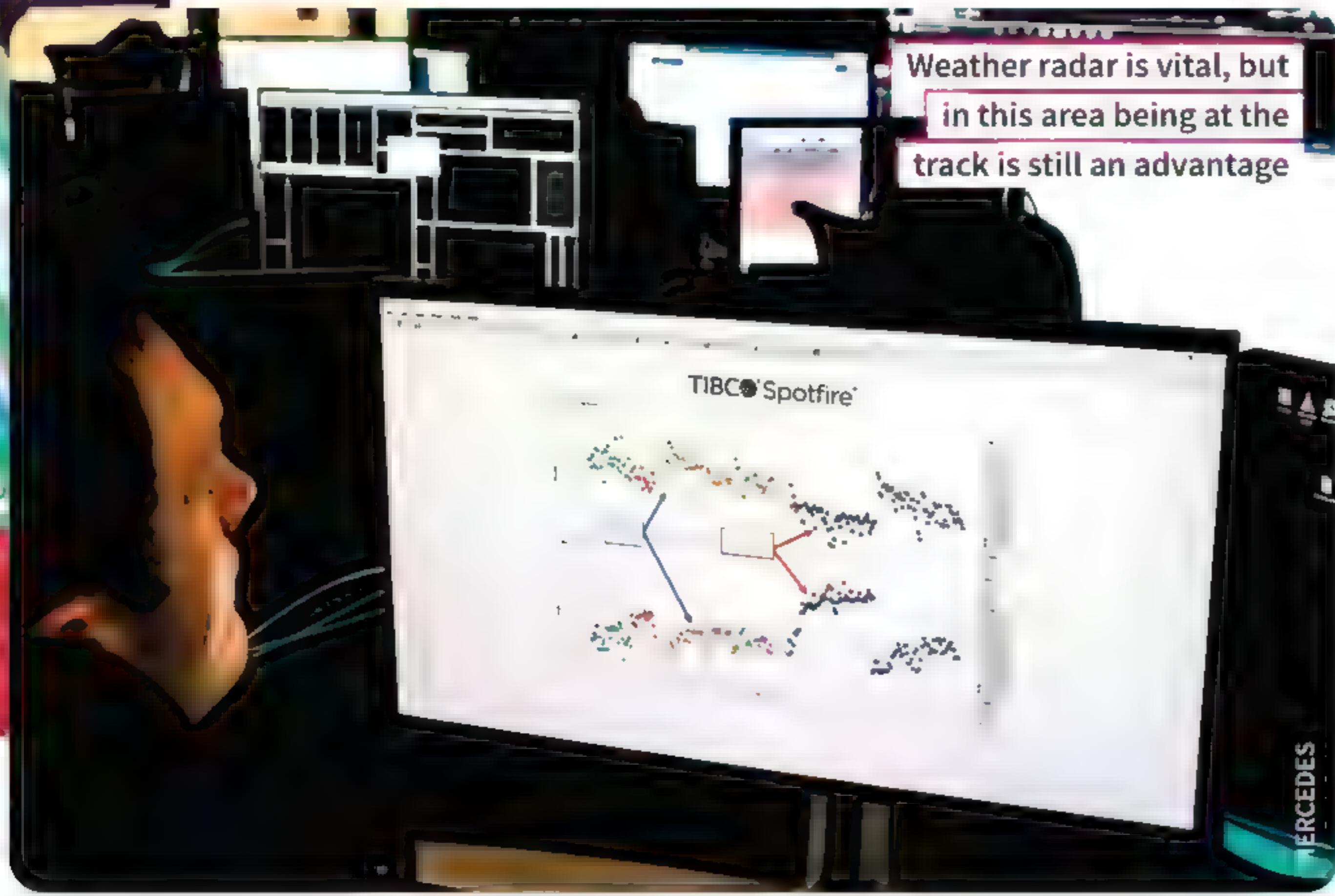
But the work has really just begun for the strategy team at the RSR. Another five or six hours await as they go through all of the data and outline the various scenarios for the race before chatting later with Vowles. On Sunday morning, further meetings follow with team members and, importantly, the drivers, to brief them on the plan for the race.

"You try and brief the drivers in packets really, rather than throw everything at them in one go," says Shovlin. "It's a



HOW THE SIMULATOR WORKS ON F1 RACE WEEKENDS

"IT'S NEVER, EVER FLAWLESS. IT'S ALWAYS LIKE, 'HOW CAN WE HAVE DONE THAT BETTER?'"



case of going through the bits they need to know in separate stages, just to avoid overloading them. The problem they've got is you can't write notes in a racing car — your notebook will blow away!"

The race that unfolds on Sunday proves the significance of the work completed by the RSR team. It is a proper strategic thriller as, just like their drivers on track, Mercedes and Red Bull strategists go head to head. Hamilton takes the lead at Turn 1, only for Red Bull to throw a curveball and pit Verstappen earlier than expected. It prompts Mercedes to extend its stints for Hamilton to create a tyre delta, leaving him with an eight-second gap to make up in the closing stages with tyres that are eight laps fresher. He ultimately falls agonisingly short, crossing the line 1.3 seconds behind Verstappen.

Post-race, the strategists will conduct a complete analysis figuring out the right and wrong calls, and whether it was possible to have won the race. The team advocates a no-blame culture and a 'blackbox thinking' approach to mistakes, learning from setbacks.

"Monday is all about what went wrong, and there's always something that went wrong," McMillan says. "Sometimes it's obvious, and there's an Autosport article about it! It's never, ever flawless. And we're always like, 'How can we have done that better?' You just have to believe in that, and make sure you never make the same mistake twice."

While the intensity of the title fight brings greater pressure than in previous years for the men and women operating in the RSR, it also means their work takes on an added meaning. "This year is definitely the most rewarding, because it's so close!" says McMillan. "I've always felt the pressure to win, and when you make a mistake it's awful, and when you win a race it's great."

"But I never quite realised how much. Like, we win on a strategy call or we lose on a strategy call — that's different when there's seven points up for grabs and so little between us. This year's crazy."

It may be thousands of miles away from the track and on a completely different timezone, but the RSR has become an integral part of the serial-winning juggernaut Mercedes has evolved into over the past decade. In a championship fight as close as the one between Hamilton and Verstappen this year, its operations may be more decisive than ever come the chequered flag in Abu Dhabi. ■

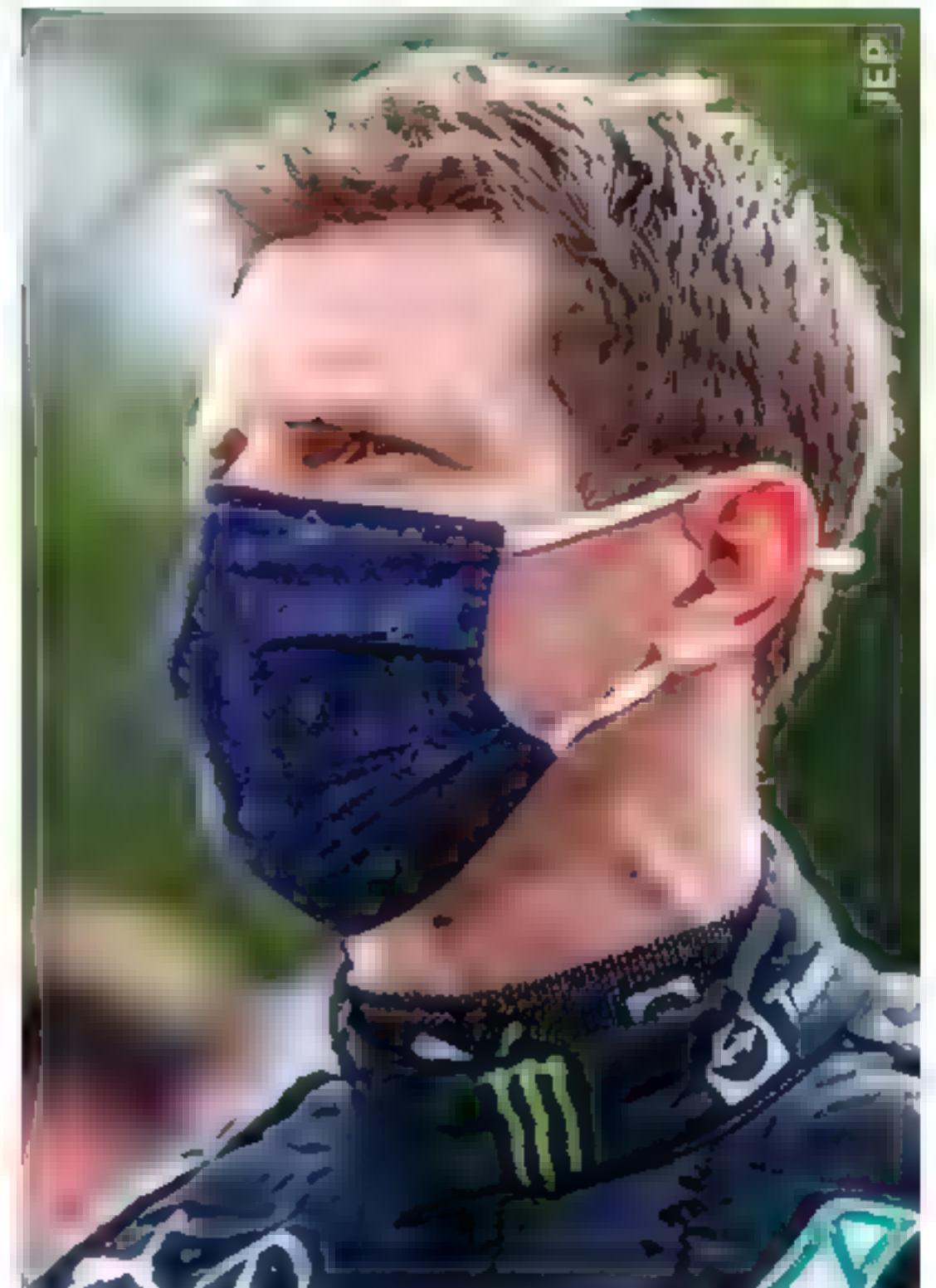
When you hear Lewis Hamilton or Valtteri Bottas talk after a successful qualifying, they will often mention "changes made overnight" by the team that led to a lap time gain. While the drivers and engineers will do their own debriefs after Friday's running, the simulator will provide some of the most crucial data and feedback to remedy any practice struggles before returning to the track on Saturday.

Ex-Formula 1 driver Anthony Davidson is a stalwart in the Mercedes simulator, while reserve drivers Stoffel Vandoorne and Nyck de Vries also contribute to its running.

"They will start running the simulator pretty much during FP2," says Dom Riefstahl. "As soon as that quali-type run has been done, and as soon as that data has been copied over, they start reproducing that lap. They'll take exactly the same set-up, do it in the simulator, and try and reproduce that lap, so the simulator represents the car."

The focus for the sim driver will depend on the nature of the track: if qualifying is make-or-break, such as in Monaco, then one-lap pace will be the priority; for Austin, it was all about race pace.

"You look at what the drivers are complaining about, what is their biggest limitation, and then you try and solve it," says Riefstahl. "The drivers will already say, 'Can you try a different front suspension or a different rear



suspension? Can you try a different rideheight? Can you try a different camber?' They will give you guidelines."

Mercedes will ensure the data matches up to their pre-event simulations — tracks such as Istanbul Park, which was quicker than expected, result in changes — and then get into the work, putting the driver through around six hours of driving over an eight or nine-hour period.

"First of all, their lap times will get quicker and quicker as they get used to the car," explains Riefstahl. "Then you get the sweet spot of where you can do all of your experiments and you'll get a good answer. And then they'll start to tail off, because everything becomes the same and they get tired."

"Different drivers are different. Anthony Davidson will happily do 125 laps on an evening and be happy with that."





THE HUMAN STORIES THAT SAVED TOYOTA'S 2021 LE MANS

Toyota's fourth win in the 24 Hours looked easy. It was anything but – without some ingenuity and tough driver demands, victory would have slipped through the team's grasp

GARY WATKINS

Sebastien Buemi had just completed a three-lap stint on Sunday morning at the Le Mans 24 Hours. The fuel-pressure issue by now afflicting both Toyotas was getting ever worse, and it looked as though extended pitstops for the two cars would be required, stops that would put them out of contention. Then his engineer came over the radio and asked him to try something strange. It was the first of two off-the-wall ideas thought up in the heat of battle that enabled the Japanese manufacturer to take a fourth straight victory in the French enduro.

Toyota may have looked to have had a straightforward run to victory at Le Mans back in August, its pair of new GR010 HYBRIDS finishing four and two laps up on third-placed

Alpine. But the reality was a long way from that. With seven hours left to go, it was far from clear to Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe that its two cars would make it cleanly to the end.

That Toyota completed a 1-2 victory was down to the ability of the Cologne-based TGRE squad to think on its feet and come up with what its technical director Pascal Vasselon calls “creative fixes”. Turning the engine off and on under braking was the initial ploy, first communicated to Buemi shortly after 0930 on Sunday, while the second involved a software rewrite and download.

Together they kept the GR010s out of the garage. It was, says Vasselon, “a very human story” that made this the “nicest” of its four wins in the blue-riband round of the World Endurance Championship.

THE PROBLEM

Toyota had suffered falling fuel pressure on both its cars at the Monza WEC round in July. The #7 GR010 had been hit in free practice, but #8 shared by Buemi, Kazuki Nakajima and Brendon Hartley was afflicted during the race. Forty-eight minutes were lost changing the fuel collector, which left their Le Mans Hypercar dead last at the finish. Race winners Kamui Kobayashi, Mike Conway and Jose Maria Lopez were lucky that their collector was replaced between practice sessions.

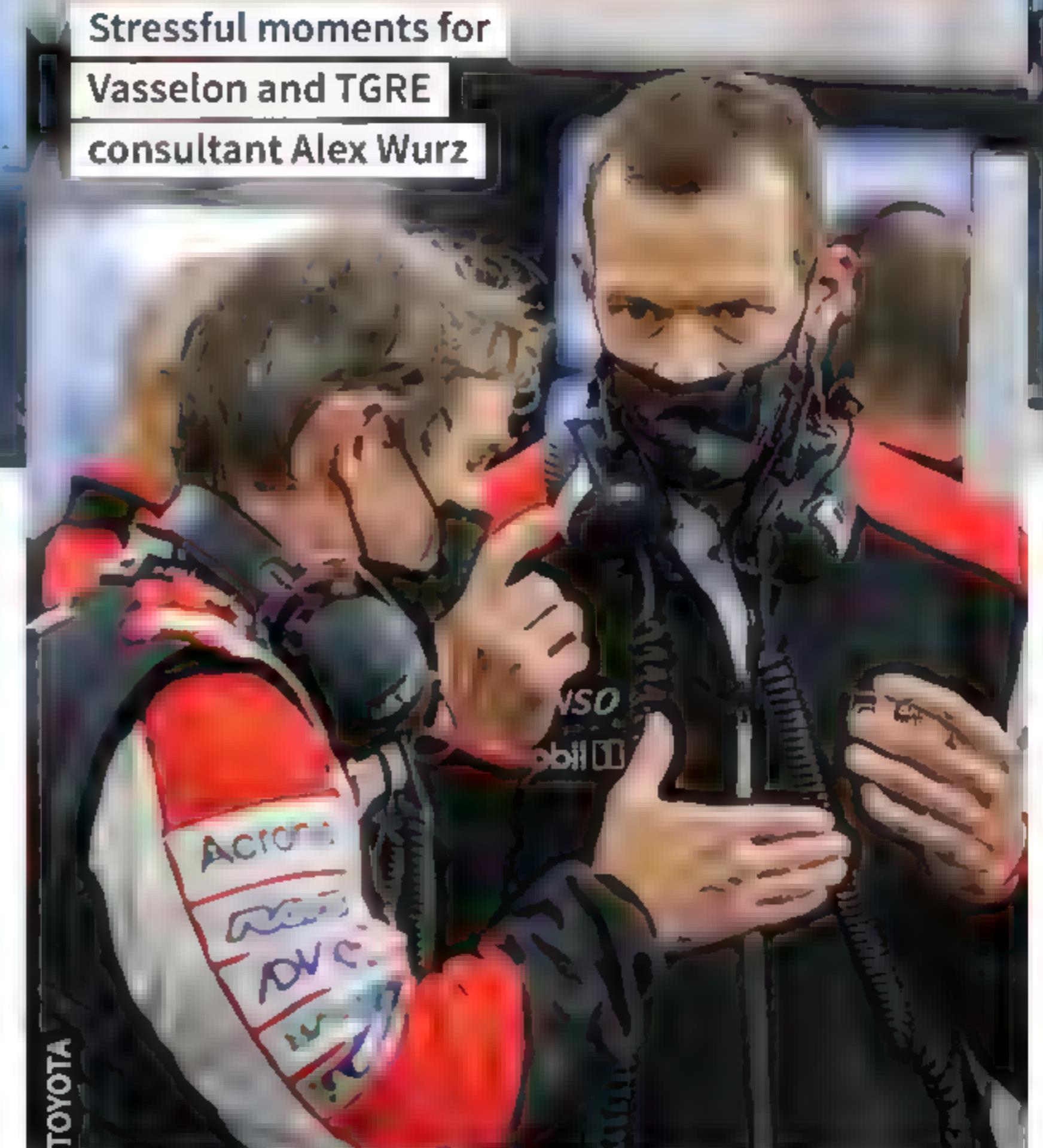
The TGRE organisation found the problem on its return to Germany. The bowsers in which it stored its fuel in the pits, new for this season, had been contaminated with aluminium oxide particles. These were mixing with grease from the fuel nozzle



Filter became clogged, causing a problem that required novel thinking



Stressful moments for Vasselon and TGRE consultant Alex Wurz



Fuel nozzle grease was part of Toyota's issue

M. CONWAY
K. KOBAYASHI
J. M. LOPEZ

connectors to block the filter in the collector at the bottom of the tank.

With the problem identified, Toyota headed to Le Mans believing there would, nor could, be no repetition. But at 0719 on Sunday, an electronic systems engineer spotted something on the telemetry fuel pressure trace from the #8 car.

"He was familiar with how the pressure trace looks when this kind of problem happens," explains Vasselon. The experience of Monza meant, he says, that the team "knew what was happening but we did not know why". There was something it was sure about, however: "We knew that this kind of problem never gets better because it is a filter getting progressively clogged by debris."

That much was clear with the increasing

regularity with which it had to pit the cars. The #8 entry, on which the problem raised its head about one hour before the sister car, made a series of ever-shorter stints. When the pressure was dropping too much, the team had no choice but to bring the car in for fear of it stopping on track.

The stint for Nakajima after the problem was spotted was nine laps, four fewer than the 13 the GR010s had been routinely managing. Buemi then took over and his stints were seven laps, then five, four and finally three.

"Very quickly we got to the point where we were stopping every three laps," recalls Vasselon. "If you have just half an hour to go, you keep going, but if you have several hours left you understand that will not work."

Toyota was facing having to change the

collectors inside the fuel tanks on the two cars at the cost of a minimum of 45 minutes. "It meant a decision to change the collector was a decision to lose the race," says Vasselon. "We weren't at Le Mans to finish in the top 10, we were only there to win, so it was an easy call to say we won't do that, we'll run as long as we can."

At the same time, he says, Toyota "kicked off a kind of brainstorming" to try to come up with what he calls "countermeasures".

FIX NUMBER ONE

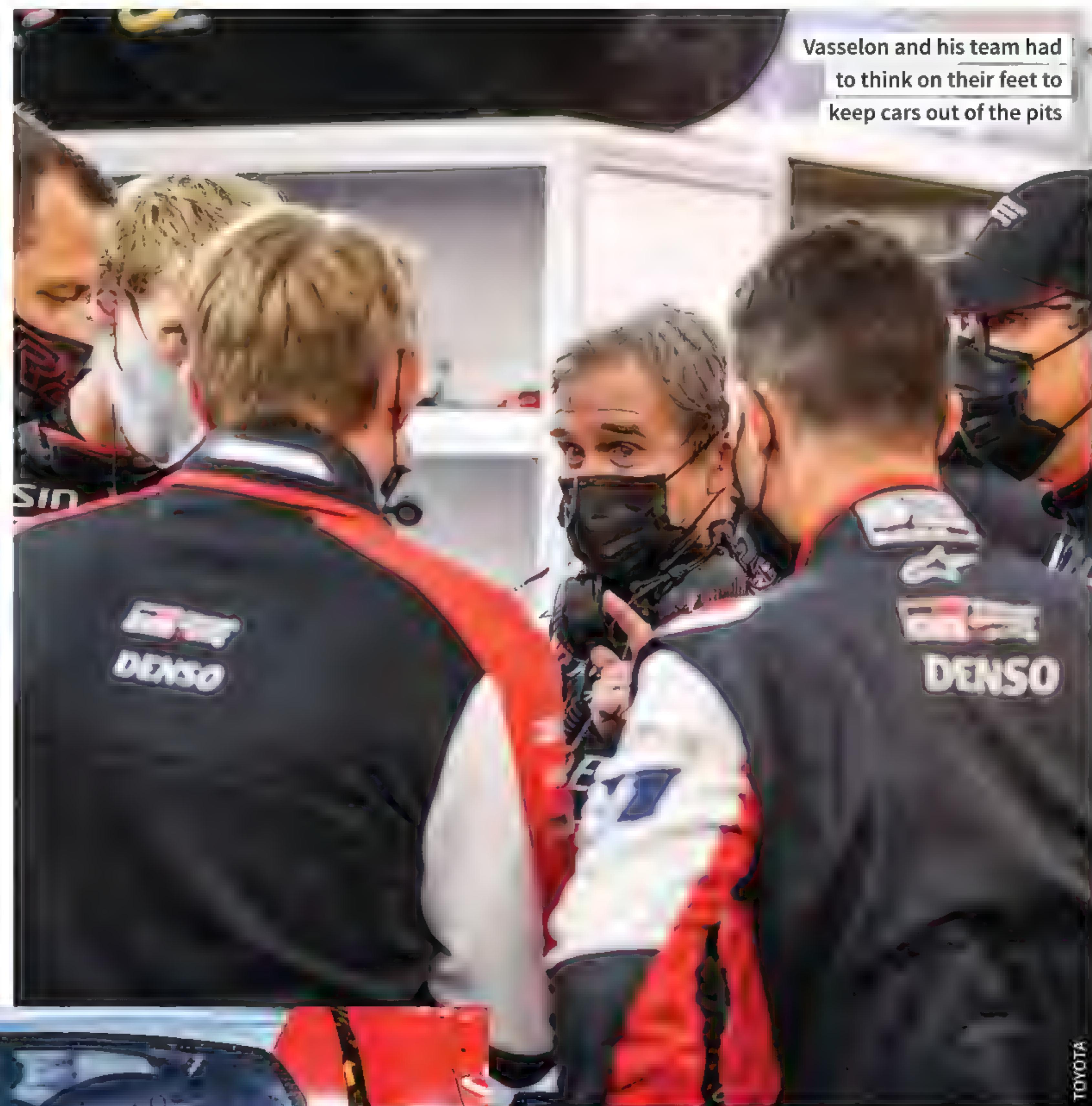
The increasingly regular pitstops sowed the seed of an idea in the minds of the engineers.

"One of our first observations was that every time we stopped in the pits, the problem was getting better," explains Vasselon. "We made several hypotheses and one of them >>

was, 'OK in the pits, what do we do? We are stopping the pump [because in the WEC the engine has to be turned off]. We thought maybe this stoppage was causing vibration in the liquid column [in the collector] that was unclogging the filter.'

The next question, he goes on, was, 'How can we stop the pump without stopping in the pits?' There was a single answer to that: 'You can only stop the fuel pump when you brake.'

That explains the strange call to Buemi over the radio. He was told to switch off the pump under braking for the first chicane on the Mulsanne Straight. The request, or rather the means of achieving it, was far from easy. There's no on-off fuel-pump switch on the GR010. Rather, the driver has to employ one of around 200 so-called driver defaults embedded within the car's electronics systems. This required the driver to activate the steering wheel display and then scroll through to the required command, driver default 7.3. With the prerequisite page on the display, the driver had to press a button to activate the default and stop the pump and then do the same to restart it before getting back on the power – all the while coming down through the gears



into a chicane from 200mph.

"The first time Séb did it perfectly, the second time he was too late to activate it and the engine ran out of fuel, but he was quick enough to get away," says Vasselon, who pointed out that if the delay was too long, the driver would have to bring the car to a halt to do a full recycle of the electronics.

More important than Buemi mastering the complexities of the procedure was that it had the desired effect. "We saw immediately that when he stopped the pump and reactivated it, the problem was improved," says Vasselon. "It was quite a relief." As, too, was the #8 car's 13-lap stint that followed.

Buemi was also relieved that the fix worked, less so when he learnt how often he'd have to be employing it. "They said, 'Amazing, it works,'" he recalls. "I thought, Good, that's it!"

Then they asked me to do it again. I said, 'What do you mean?' They told me we needed to do it every lap!"

Every lap quickly became every corner, or at least those with significant braking involved.

The falling fuel pressure wasn't what Vasselon calls "a stable problem". Rather, he says, it "was getting worse" since the filter became ever more clogged as the race progressed: "We started doing it once per lap. Very quickly that became not enough. Step by step we went to six times per lap."

DRIVER STRESSES

For Buemi it was "a mentally draining" exercise. "I was happy to get out of the car because I was dead," he says. "You're doing all the normal stuff, braking, turning and trying not to touch another car at the same time

"THE PROCEDURE WAS NOT COMPLEX, TIMING MADE IT DIFFICULT"

as looking at the steering wheel and pressing the buttons. The procedure was not complex, but the timing made it difficult."

Once the dd7.3 page had been selected it would stay selected, only the screen on the Toyota goes to sleep after three seconds. In that scenario the default cannot be activated. "The timing was critical: that made it more energy-consuming," adds Buemi. "But understanding that we might make it with this solution gave us the energy."

Vasselon still finds it incredible that the six drivers were able to undertake the procedure without making mistakes or losing time: "We were thinking that we would lose seconds per lap, but we didn't – this was quite remarkable."

FIX NUMBER TWO

As debris continued to accumulate in the filter, "stopping the main pump six times per lap became insufficient" on its own after about four and a half hours, recalls Vasselon. Pitstops to change the collector were looming again, he says, but the "brainstorming in the background was continuing".

The lead systems engineer then came up with another idea. The collector containing the main pump is fed by lift pumps in the tank. The Toyota has four of these, two of which are



active at any one time. The other two are, in effect, back-ups.

"The idea was to employ all four pumps at once to create turbulence in the collector and to increase the pressure around the filter," explains Vasselon. "This was the idea: the problem was that to implement it needed a software change. Our leader of system engineering coded some software changes and passed it to Cologne to debug and check."

Once the software was signed off, it was downloaded into #8 at approximately 1400, two hours before the finish, and then into the second car 45 minutes later.

"Immediately we saw the situation was improving," says Vasselon. "It was restoring some pressure."

THE TWIST IN THE TALE

The winning Toyota shared by Kobayashi, Conway and Lopez was able to make the end of the race with these two countermeasures in place. The second-placed #8 needed further nursing to see the chequered flag.

Vasselon: "The situation was still degrading in #8. The pressure drop was higher when the driver was asking for more fuel. In the last half-hour we told Kazuki to accelerate at half-throttle in the most critical corners."

The worsening situation in the second-placed entry explains why Nakajima was briefly held in the pits with just over 10 minutes to go to wait for the other Toyota. "It might have looked like a decision to have the two cars cross the line together," says Vasselon, "but the main reason was to avoid #8 having to do one more lap."

THE CAUSE

Vasselon describes it as a "complex phenomenon" distinct from the Monza problem: "The root cause was different at Le Mans." This time the grease from the refuelling connectors, which on its own passes through the 10-micron fuel filter, was mixing with polyurethane particles from the bladder inside the fuel cell.

"We found out that the fuel bladder was collapsing every stint when it was emptying as the fuel was used," explains Vasselon. "As it was collapsing the inner walls were rubbing into each other and generating the particles."



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

The collapsing bladder resulted from inadequacies of the fuel breather, which was largely carried over from the TS050 HYBRID LMP1 car. The rate of fuel usage in the LMH car is much higher because Toyota's new 3.5-litre twin-turbo is both more powerful and less efficient than the old car's 2.4 unit. That was creating a partial vacuum in the tank, causing it to collapse. The breather system has now been modified accordingly.

"Motorsport is about never giving up and teamwork," says Vasselon. "But at Le Mans this year we went quite extreme with those two mottos." *

➔ P42 WEC BAHRAIN REPORT

SEASON
REVIEW

PALOU IS SASSY AT GANASSI

The IndyCar sophomore stunned by overcoming team-mate Scott Dixon and the rest of a white-hot field. He was fast and, just as important, he was smart

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES

Reporters, drivers, team owners, race engineers and fans will regularly point out that IndyCar is insanely close, that there are 20 potential winners every weekend and so on. And that's true. So it's a measure of Alex Palou's brilliance in 2021 that he made it look easy, overcame setbacks that were not of his making, and prevailed over a field of aces, including veterans and his fellow Generation Z members. It's as if he alone was capable of not only understanding the formula for championship glory, but also faithfully following it.

Certainly, Palou carried out to the letter Chip Ganassi's maxim of, 'If you can't be first, be second; if you can't be second, be third,' etc. Unless something out of his control put him out, you could count on the Honda-engined #10 Chip Ganassi Racing car to be in the mix for a top-five finish. The 24-year-old Spaniard was in only his second year at this level, yet already he had the consistency of an IndyCar veteran blended with the relentless enthusiasm of youth.

Perhaps primary among Palou's skill set is exquisite judgment, his ability to resist allowing his emotions to override his assessment of what is or isn't feasible on any given day or in any given wheel-to-wheel situation. With up to 27 other cars to overpower, be they fast rivals or drivers he wishes to lap who are desperately trying to stay on the lead lap, there are ample opportunities in IndyCar for a driver to throw his car off or compromise his own strategy by rooting his tyres or burning up too much fuel trying to make a pass.

Take Portland, the third race from the end of the season. Palou scored his first IndyCar pole, but was compromised by team-mate Scott Dixon into Turn 1 at the start, as the six-time champion was nudged from behind by Palou's predecessor at Ganassi, Felix Rosenqvist. Dixon was forced straight on through the notorious chicane, so Palou on his outside and with nowhere to turn in had to do the same. It looked as if the pair had done the perfect job of avoiding a disastrous clash, but IndyCar Race Control ordered them back to 15th and 16th for the restart, punishment for leaving the racing surface.

There are conflicting stories regarding what happened over the radio next. Dario Franchitti, Ganassi's driver advisor and the man who Palou most closely emulates in terms of temperament, said his charge remained calm, yet the man himself said he needed to be soothed into accepting his penalty. Whatever the case, Palou channelled his indignation into a beautiful drive, matched by the team's perfect reading of the necessary strategy and his own crew's slick pitstops, and he came through to score his third win of the year. On a day when his closest title rivals Dixon, Josef Newgarden and Pato O'Ward finished third, fifth and 14th respectively, it was a big points day for Palou.



"IT'S A MEASURE OF HIS BRILLIANCE THAT PALOU MADE IT LOOK EASY AND PREVAILED OVER A FIELD OF ACES"

But it was also important psychologically, for the previous three races had been unsatisfactory. An engine change grid penalty had left Palou with too much to do at Nashville and, although he showed that uncanny knack of avoiding trouble on a weekend when some drivers appeared to go seeking it, he could recover only to seventh. Then in the season's second race on the Indianapolis road course, Palou was set to finish fourth when his engine let go, not only losing him points but also meaning another penalty for the next race at Gateway due to another new engine. That sent him tumbling to near the back of the grid, and Ganassi didn't appear to be on the pace on the 1.25-mile oval. Yet he scythed through, only for he and Dixon to be sent into the wall by an overambitious Rinus VeeKay.

That pressure, added to his annoyance at the penalty in Portland, could have caused a meltdown from even the most seasoned pro, >>

ROUND BY ROUND



Barber Mspts Park

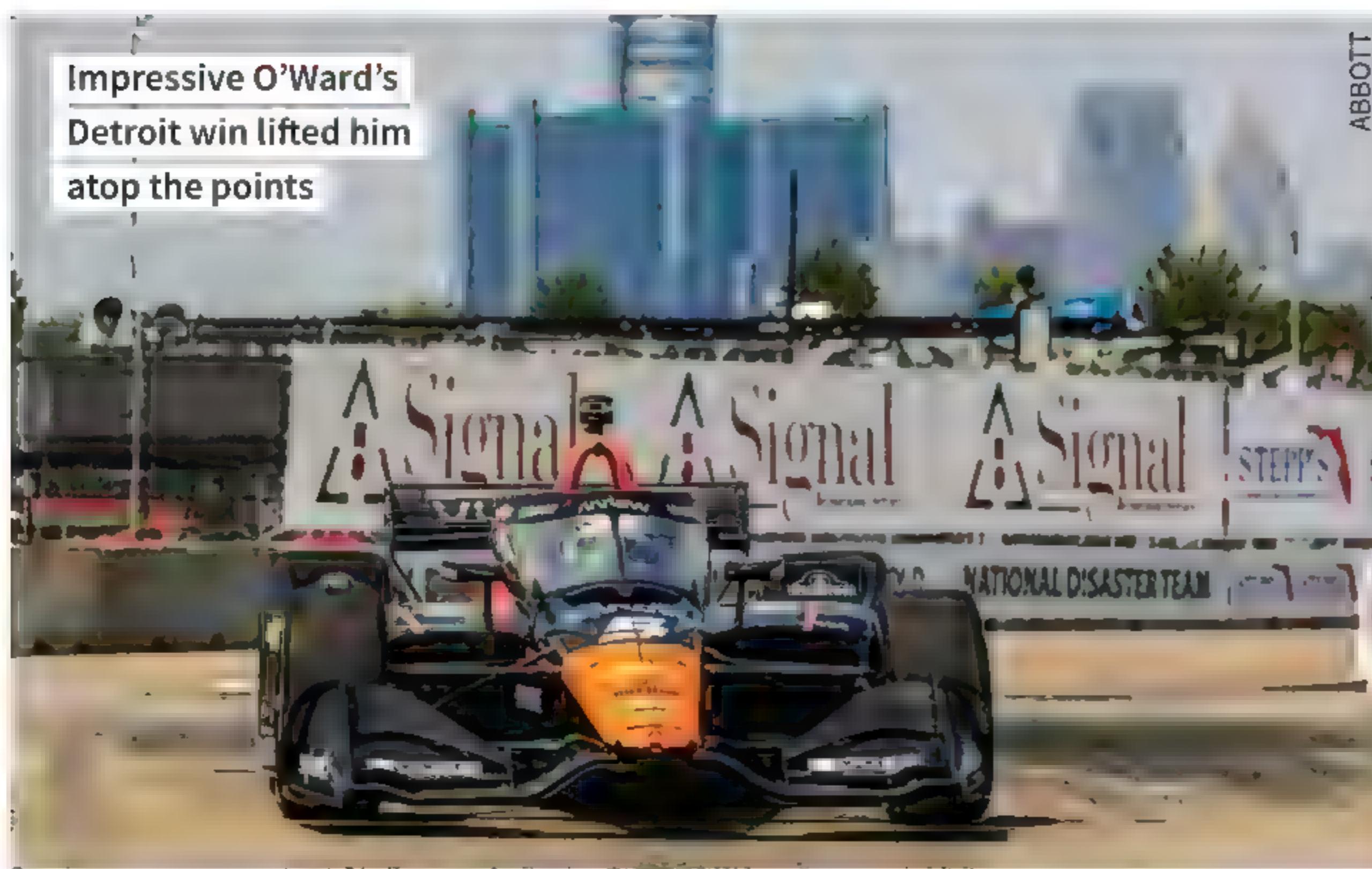
1 Alex Palou
2 Will Power
3 Scott Dixon
 O'Ward carries strong off-season testing momentum through to qualifying to deliver pole ahead of Rossi. But O'Ward uses his tyres too swiftly, and Rossi starts on half-tanks to keep up, so both fall backward after their first stops. That leaves Palou to score his first IndyCar win in his first race for Ganassi, holding off old masters Power and Dixon.

St Petersburg

1 Colton Herta
2 Josef Newgarden
3 Simon Pagenaud
 Herta, as if making up for his errors at the same track the previous year, dominates the event, pursued doggedly by Newgarden. Harvey starts his Meyer Shank Racing car from the front row but drops to fourth, allowing Pagenaud to score his first podium of the year. Team-mate Power, usually a St Pete expert, messes up qualifying so has to climb from 20th to claim eighth position.

Texas MS 1

1 Scott Dixon
2 Scott McLaughlin
3 Pato O'Ward
 Grid decided by points order due to rain in qualifying. Dixon swiftly passes polesitter Palou and leaves everyone behind. A late caution compresses the field, allowing McLaughlin to chase his hero to the flag. Palou falls to fourth but scores his best oval result yet, while Newgarden overcomes a penalty for puniting Bourdais into a spin to come home sixth.



"PATO O'WARD CAN BE A JOY TO WATCH, MAKING INCISIVE PASSES, RACING VERY HARD BUT FAIR"

yet Palou's final three races resulted in a first, a second and a fourth.

Palou wasn't quite flawless. There was his relative anonymity in St Petersburg, just a week after his first win in the season-opener at Barber Motorsports Park. There was a crash on the first qualifying day at the Indianapolis 500, and possibly inexperience that cost him the win in a battle with IMS legend Helio Castroneves. He was outpaced by team-mate Marcus Ericsson at Mid-Ohio. But really, that was about it. Set against these minor quibbles was a record of finishing half of the 16 races in the top three, including three wins.

Against such flawless attack and solid defence, his rivals were destined to struggle, and inevitably those most likely to suffer in direct comparison were his team-mates. For the first time since 2011, Dixon was beaten over a season by a driver from the same stable, and at times he seemed nonplussed as to why. Part of it was qualifying, which has long been the weakest part of an otherwise supremely strong skill set. He can set brilliant sector times, but stringing them together for the ideal lap has proven troublesome.

In the past Dixon could shrug that off and bounce back on race day with a combination of relentless fast laps and the best pitcrew, but there were too many days this year when the usual magic never appeared. His performances at Detroit, Mid-Ohio, the Indy road



course and Laguna Seca just weren't what we'd normally see from him, and every time someone on his own team did the job better.

That said, he had his unlucky days, none more so than Memorial Day Weekend, when many were predicting he would at last nail his second 500 win. He lost it through no fault of his own: a badly timed caution period combined with a Honda that wouldn't restart. A strategy dilemma in race two at Texas Motor Speedway killed his hopes of a double there, having dominated race one. But it's hard to recall any other days where you'd say he missed out on victory. He just wasn't in the top three as much as we've come to expect.

Consequently, for much of the season O'Ward was Palou's main rival, as Arrow McLaren SP turned IndyCar's Big Three teams into a Big Four. Both of O'Ward's first two wins – at Texas and in the second Detroit race – were delivered in swashbuckling style, and he is a joy to watch on these occasions, making incisive passes, racing very hard but fair. His on-track ethics made his exit from the season finale at Long Beach particularly hard to watch, even though he and we all knew that by then the title was a hellishly long shot.

But there were times when the team's F1-influenced set-ups, which turn on the car's tyres quicker than at any other team – and/or his response to such set-ups – cost him dearly. He couldn't keep

ROUND BY ROUND

Texas MS 2

1 Pato O'Ward
2 Josef Newgarden
3 Graham Rahal
 Pile-up at the start triggered by Fittipaldi causes Bourdais (among others) to crash out again. Dixon looks set for another dominant run, but the way the yellows fall within his strategy makes him drop back and save fuel. Newgarden leads, but O'Ward's ever-improving car keeps gaining, passes the Penske car and drops him. O'Ward and AMSP score their first win together.

Indianapolis GP

1 Rinus VeeKay
2 Romain Grosjean
3 Alex Palou
 Grosjean scores an emotional first pole but the blue flags – or the lack of rules regarding them – forces him to battle with Bourdais and Sato when lapping them, costing him precious time. That allows VeeKay to pass him and score his first win. Palou comfortably holds off Newgarden for final podium spot, while Rahal surges through to take fifth ahead of Pagenaud.

Indianapolis 500

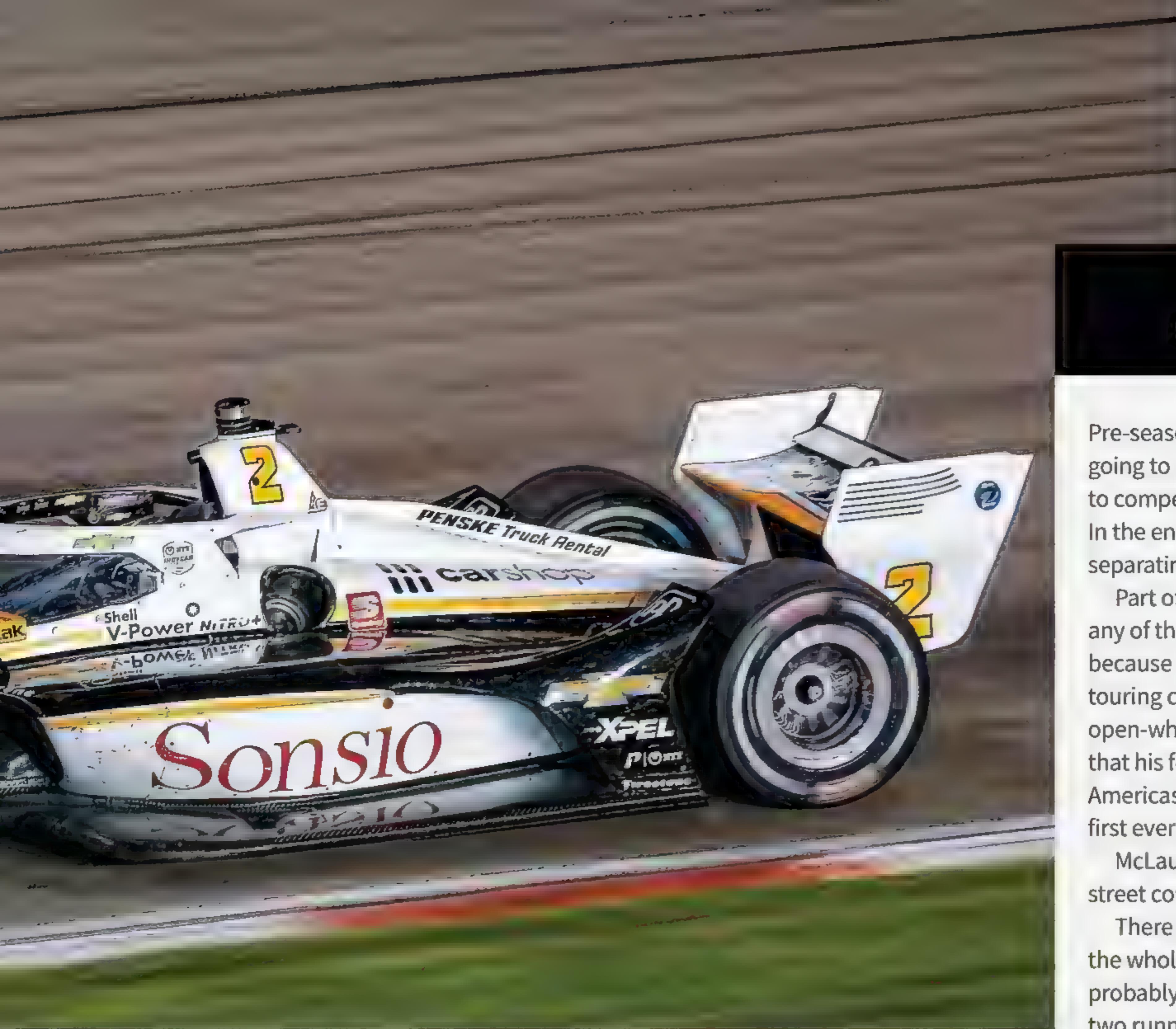
1 Helio Castroneves
2 Alex Palou
3 Simon Pagenaud
 Dixon looks to have pace in hand, until a crash closes pitlane before his first pitstop, forcing him to run his tank dry before pitting. His engine won't refire until he's lost a lap. Palou battles with Castroneves (first race for Meyer Shank), and experience defeats youth, Helio scoring his fourth Indy win. Pagenaud recovers from Penske's qualifying woes to finish a close third.

Belle Isle, Detroit 1

1 Marcus Ericsson
2 Rinus VeeKay
3 Pato O'Ward
 Race marred by stoppage for a heavy crash for Rosenqvist, which will force the AMSP driver to skip two races. Power appears set to score Penske's first win of 2021 until another late red flag for a Grosjean shunt sends everyone to pitlane and the Penske car won't restart on command. That leaves Ericsson out front to hold off the charging VeeKay and O'Ward to the end.

Belle Isle, Detroit 2

1 Pato O'Ward
2 Josef Newgarden
3 Alex Palou
 Polesitter Newgarden leads most of the way, but an earlier off-strategy stop compromises his chances, forcing him to run the red tyres too long in the final stint. O'Ward surges past five cars following the final restart to take a thrilling win, but the limping Newgarden holds off Palou and Herta for second. Power, from 20th on the grid, makes a late pass on Dixon for sixth behind Rahal.



NEW ZEALAND'S OTHER SCOTT IS PRETTY GOOD TOO

Pre-season there was little doubt that Scott McLaughlin was going to be rookie of the year because he was the only one set to compete in all rounds, and he was driving for Team Penske. In the end it was far closer than he wanted, only 33 points separating the Kiwi from Romain Grosjean.

Part of this was down to Penske not being fastest in any of the races in the first half of the season, but it was also because McLaughlin was making the huge transition from touring cars to IndyCar with virtually no prior knowledge of open-wheel machinery. But he did enough to demonstrate that his form in the 2020 Spring Training at Circuit of The Americas had been no fluke, not only scoring a podium in his first ever oval race but following up with four more top 10s.

McLaughlin's major issue was qualifying pace on road and street courses, despite looking strong on race day pace.

There were no such worries for Grosjean who, had he done the whole season at Dale Coyne Racing with RWR, would probably be sixth in our top 10. He frequently sparkled and two runner-up positions and a third were fully deserved. Occasionally his natural ebullience led to trouble but his pace and the speed at which he learned tracks were everything you'd expect. His first oval race at Gateway was also superb, and he will be fascinating to watch as a full-time driver at Andretti Autosport next year.

Jimmie Johnson's struggles were predictable but, Detroit and Nashville aside, he rarely looked out of his depth and made notable progress in the final third of the year. He knows better than anyone that the next step up will be tougher still.



ABBOTT

the rubber under him at Barber Motorsports Park after scoring pole, he looked like tethered prey when pursued by Will Power in the second Indy road course race, and there were several races where his presence would have gone almost unnoticed, had he not been a title contender. But if AMSP makes the same progress in the off-season that it made in 2021, he could be championship favourite for 2022: he's extremely fast and still makes very few major errors.

One of the talking points of the first two thirds of the season was the absence of wins for Penske, and while that mini-drought should have been ended by Power in Detroit race one (his engine failed to restart after a red flag while he'd been leading), or Newgarden at Road America (his transmission crapped out on the penultimate lap following a restart), the team wasn't firing on all cylinders most of the time. Power was beaten by Palou at Barber, Newgarden by Colton Herta at St Petersburg and by O'Ward in the second Texas race.

When they were good, they were very good, in that Newgarden's wins at Mid-Ohio and Gateway and Power's triumph in the second Indy road course race looked foregone conclusions as soon as they hit the front. But Power temporarily lost his qualifying mojo in the middle third of the season, and Newgarden faltered similarly in the final third, at least until that great pole position at Long Beach. >>

Road America

1 Alex Palou
2 Colton Herta
3 Will Power
Polesitter Newgarden leads most of the way, but a gearbox malady on the penultimate lap robs him of victory, and so Palou sweeps to his second win of the year, ahead of Herta and Power. VeeKay is withdrawn after breaking his collarbone in a biking accident, and is replaced by former Indy Lights rival Oliver Askew. Kevin Magnussen makes his IndyCar debut with AMSP.

Mid-Ohio

1 Josef Newgarden
2 Marcus Ericsson
3 Alex Palou
Polesitter Newgarden leads most of the way and this time nothing goes wrong, finally scoring Penske's first win of the season. But he has to watch his mirrors in the closing stages for Ericsson, who has produced his best race yet, outpacing both Palou and six-time champion Dixon, who clashes with Power on lap one, sending the Aussie into a spin that leads to a crash.

Nashville

1 Marcus Ericsson
2 Scott Dixon
3 James Hinchcliffe
Herta is dominant all weekend, but several inconveniently timed red and yellow-flag periods shuffle him back. He claws up to second, but struggles to get close to Ericsson, who is recovering from a penalty for a silly crash early on. This time it's Herta who shunts, leaving the Swede to an amazing win ahead of Dixon. Hinchcliffe takes his first podium in two years.

Indianapolis GP 2

1 Will Power
2 Romain Grosjean
3 Colton Herta
In qualifying the top five – including RLL debutant Christian Lundgaard – are covered by a mere 0.048s! Polesitter O'Ward, on red tyres, leads but can't escape Power, who has started on blacks. When they swap compounds, Power closes in, passes and scores his 40th career win. Grosjean passes Herta for second near the end, O'Ward is fifth, while Palou's engine blows up.

Gateway

1 Josef Newgarden
2 Pato O'Ward
3 Will Power
Power takes pole but has a poor race set-up so the battle is between Newgarden and Herta, until Herta breaks a driveshaft. McLaughlin scores another fine oval result with fourth, while Dixon and Palou are taken out by VeeKay. This race is Grosjean's oval debut and, while he makes a couple of errors, he shows fine judgement in his passing manoeuvres.



Dixon could add just one win to his 50 previous, at Texas Motor Speedway

But nowhere highlighted Penske's struggles with consistency better than qualifying at the Indy 500, when rookie Scott McLaughlin was the fastest of the Captain's cars in 17th, and Will Power came worryingly close to not making the field.

Andretti Autosport's Herta was the only driver to match Palou's tally of three wins – St Petersburg, Laguna Seca and Long Beach – but could add only two more podiums, which is why he ended up fifth in the points. The inaugural race at Nashville should have resulted in another triumph, for there was no driver this year who had a greater speed advantage over his rivals at any track than Herta did that weekend. But, having been wrongfooted by caution periods, he found himself chasing down Ericsson for the win and shunted in sheer frustration.

To be fair, that was his only significant error of the season, so is forgiveable, and can be put in his memory bank. The fact is, for the second straight year Herta was Andretti Autosport's only winner and, team allowing, in 2022 he could deliver Michael Andretti's squad its first championship for a decade.



"PART-TIMER CASTRONEVES TAUGHT THE YOUNG STUDS A LESSON IN READING THE ROAD"

Ericsson blossomed in 2021, and if he was a tad lucky to find himself at the front in both Detroit and Nashville – especially given the size of his shunt in the early stages of the latter event! – he seized both opportunities and his confidence soared. He just needs to stop making costly little errors in qualifying so that he can bang on the door to Victory Lane more often.

There were two other race winners this year, and both found their glory at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. There was Meyer Shank Racing's part-timer Castroneves, who taught the young studs a lesson in reading the road ahead, planning attacks, and throwing up strong defence, and duly delivered his fourth Indy 500 victory – and MSR's first IndyCar win.

Two weeks earlier, Ed Carpenter Racing's VeeKay joined Palou and O'Ward in the list of 2021's first-time winners in the Grand Prix of Indianapolis. But after backing that up with a fine second place at Detroit, VeeKay injured himself falling off a bike and his season rather dissolved, failing to crack the top 15 ever again. His talent suggests he has the potential to be battling with Palou, Herta and O'Ward for the next 20 years, should they all remain in IndyCar. But of this quartet, VeeKay is lowest down the learning curve and urgently needs to throw himself into allowing ECR to help him rediscover their form together. #

ROUND BY ROUND

Portland

1 Alex Palou

2 Alexander Rossi

3 Scott Dixon

Palou earns his first pole, but the traditional Turn 1 chaos means he and Dixon are shuffled down the order by Race Control, leaving Rahal and O'Ward temporarily fighting over the lead. But Palou and Dixon charge through to finish first and third respectively, split by front-row starter Rossi, who thereby scores his only podium of the year. Harvey takes fourth for MSR.

Laguna Seca

1 Colton Herta

2 Alex Palou

3 Romain Grosjean

Herta does what he did in the previous race here in 2019, taking pole and victory in dominant fashion. His nearest pursuer should be Power (but the Chevy suffers an electrical issue) or Rossi (but he spins after tapping Herta's wheel), so it's Palou who takes second, while struggling O'Ward is fifth. Grosjean makes a spectacular climb from 13th to third, ahead of Rahal.

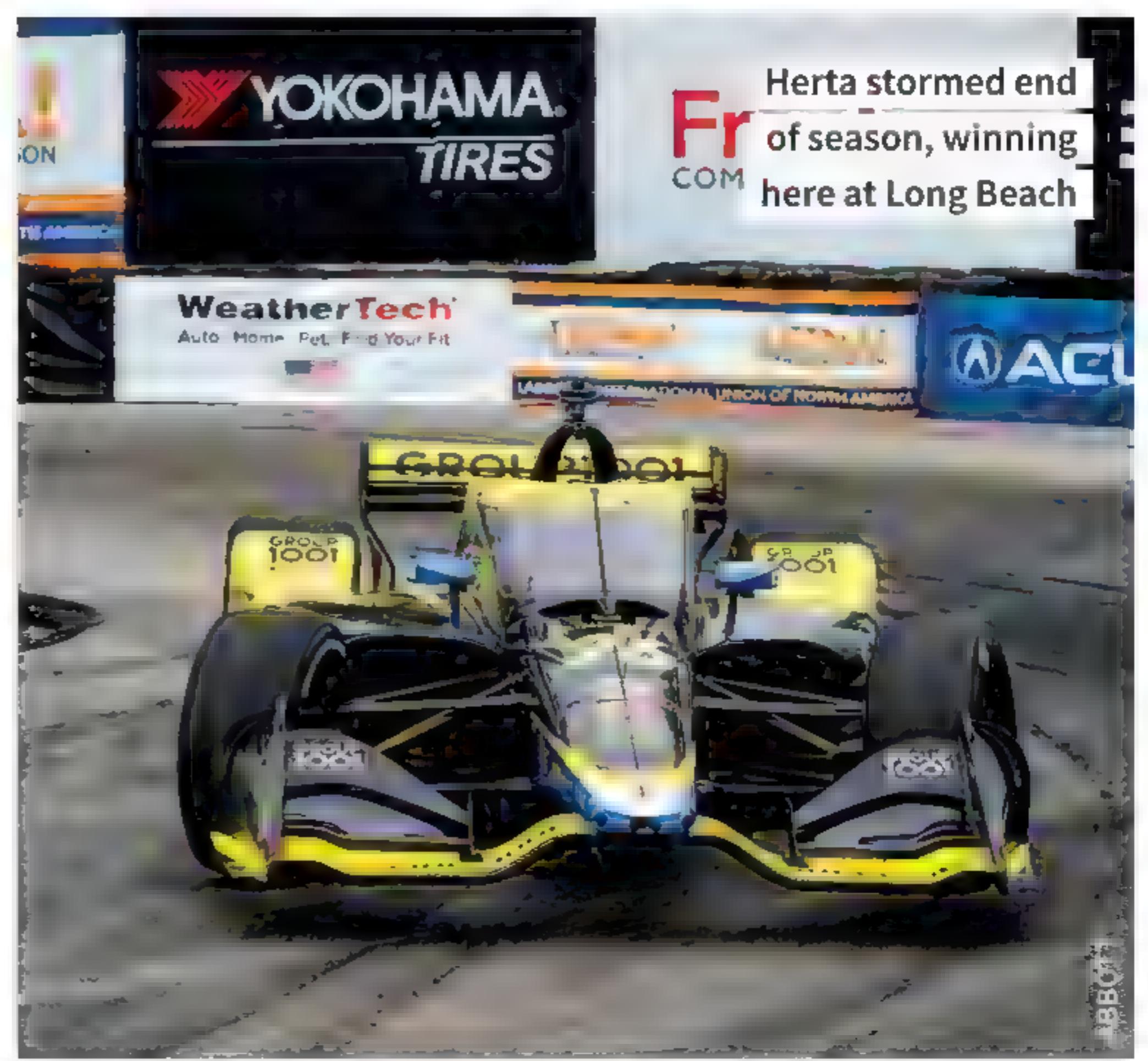
Long Beach

1 Colton Herta

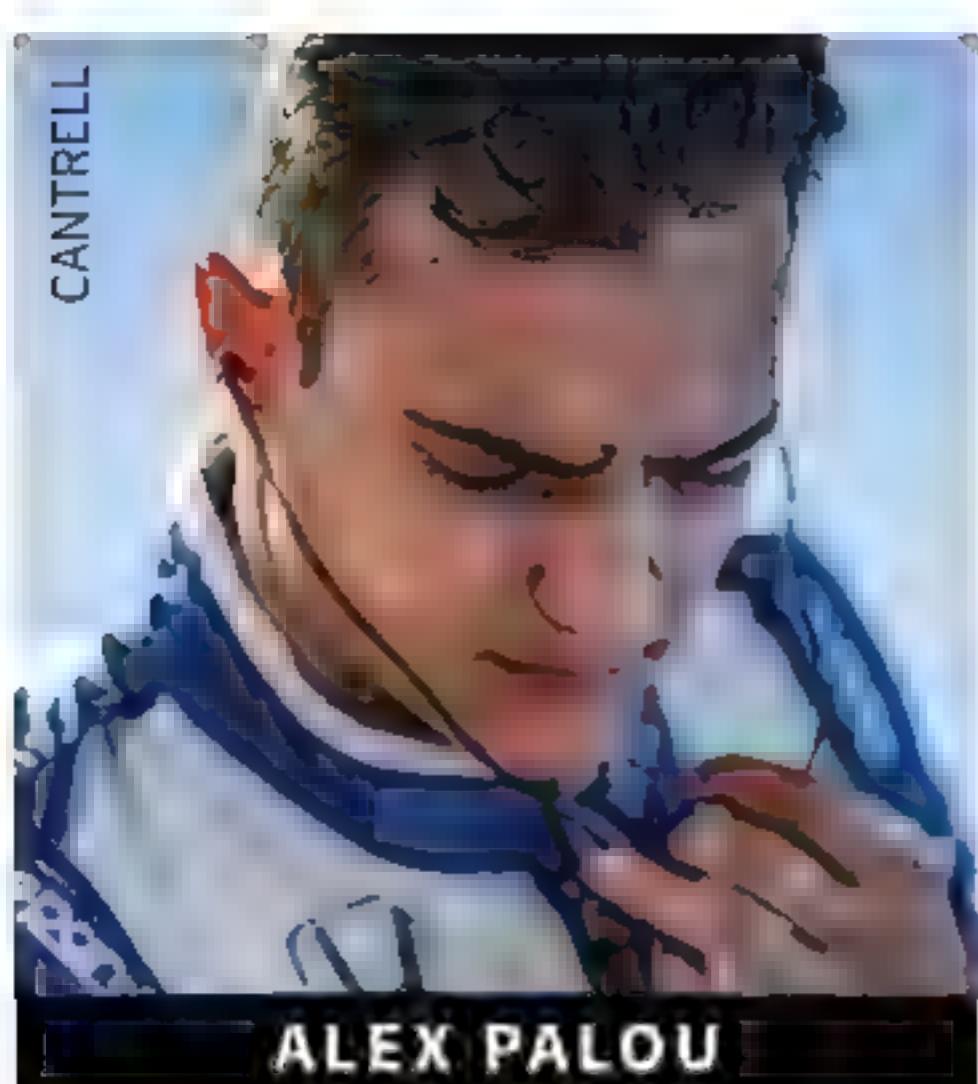
2 Josef Newgarden

3 Scott Dixon

Messy qualifying forces O'Ward and Palou to start eighth and 10th respectively, while Newgarden takes pole. O'Ward is punted into a spin by Jones, causing damage that likely causes his eventual retirement. Herta, who has qualified 14th due to bad tyre strategy, slices through the pack to take victory, while Palou rises from 10th to come home fourth and take the title.



AUTOSPORT'S TOP 10 DRIVERS



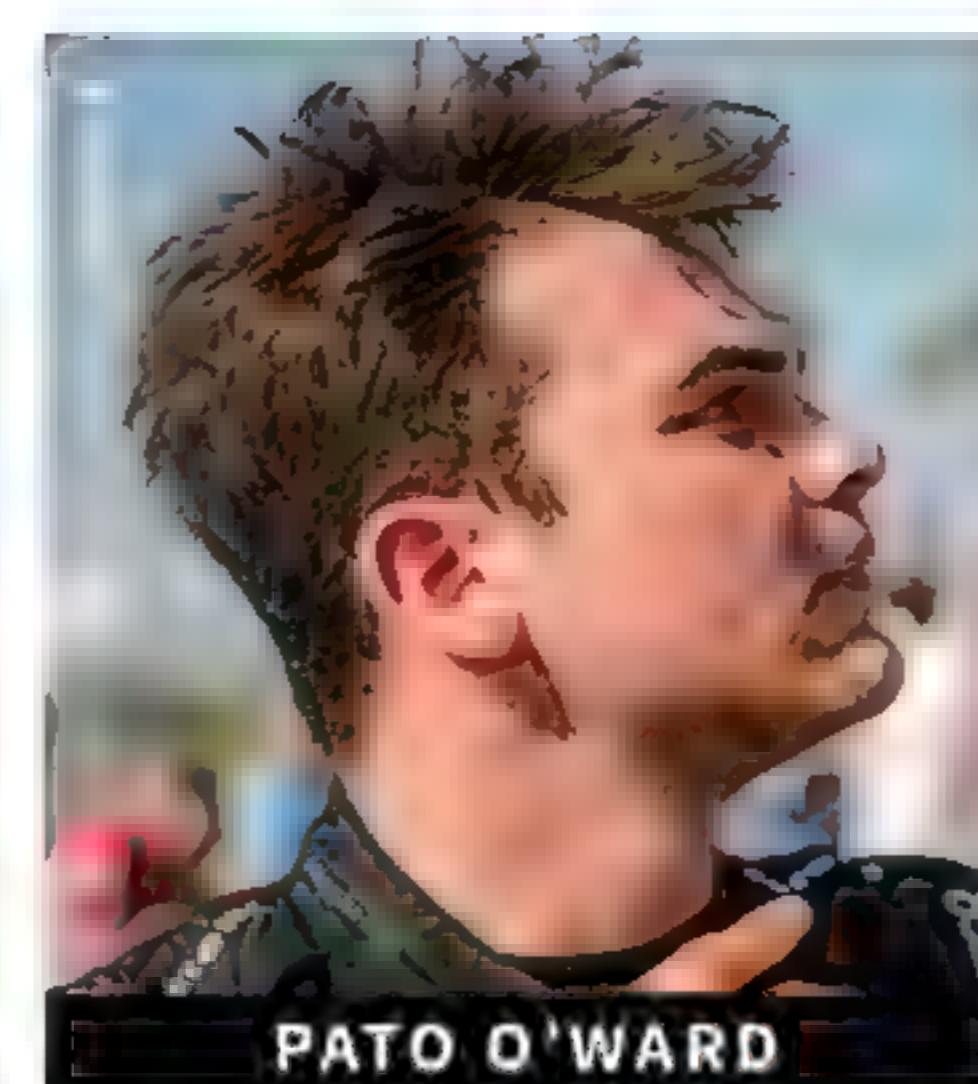
ALEX PALOU



COLTON HERTA



JOSEF NEWGARDEN



PATO O'WARD



SCOTT DIXON

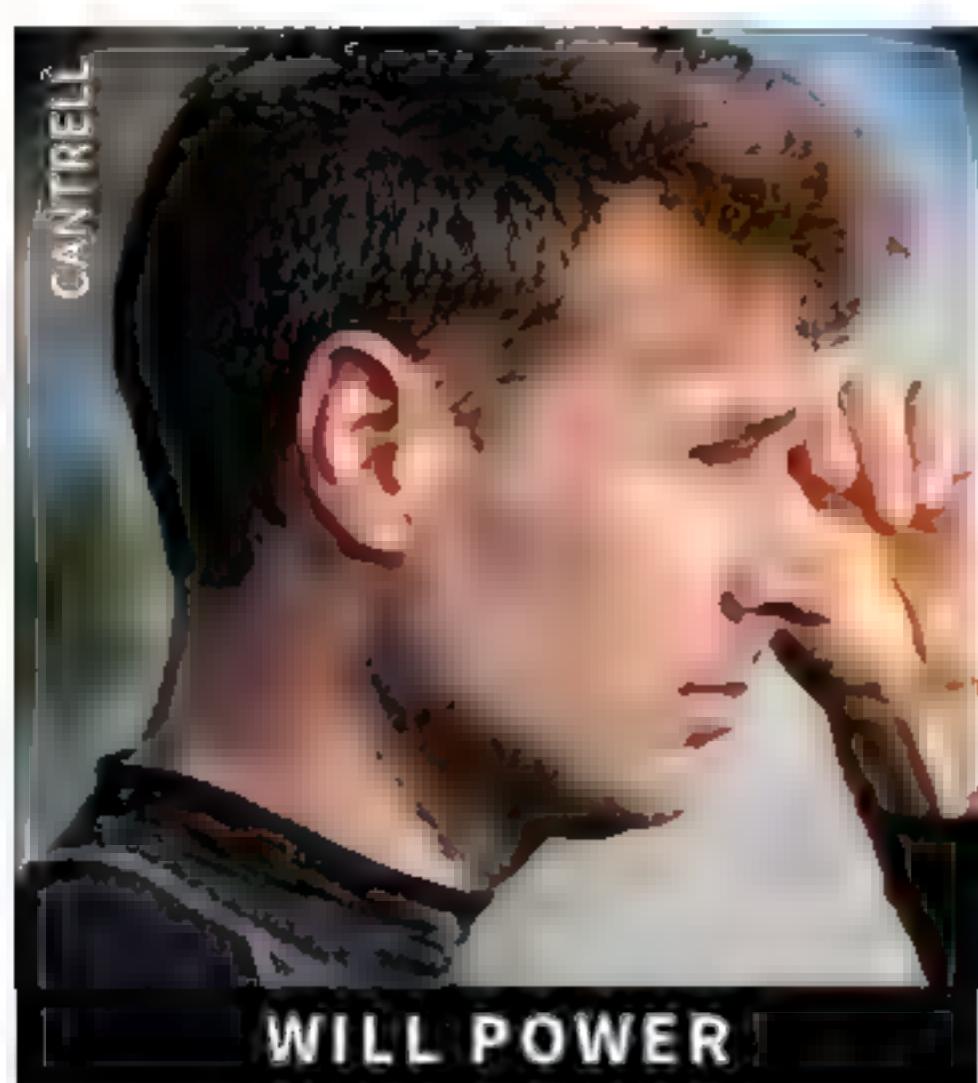
1 The most complete driver of 2021, he managed to deliver even on tracks with which he was unfamiliar, and remained unflustered even when circumstances went against him. It would have been a travesty if the title had gone elsewhere.

2 Has all the necessary speed and work ethic to be Palou's biggest threat over the next 15 years. There were days where he appeared untouchable and, Nashville apart, he's another who knows how to stay calm at crucial moments.

3 Was super-fast at times and can also make the best of a bad situation. Without the Road America gearbox failure that handed victory to Palou, he'd have his third title. Shaky qualifying performances in the season's final third killed his hopes.

4 Thoroughly deserved his first two wins, both times looking irresistible. The car's peculiar traits that turn on the softer compound Firestones rapidly also made it slow on primaries, forcing him to overdrive too often and burn off his rears.

5 The six-time champion had his least convincing year since 2016... yet finished fourth in the points. Palou's driving style is quite different from his own, so at times his pursuit of the ideal set-up was a solo venture, with mixed results.



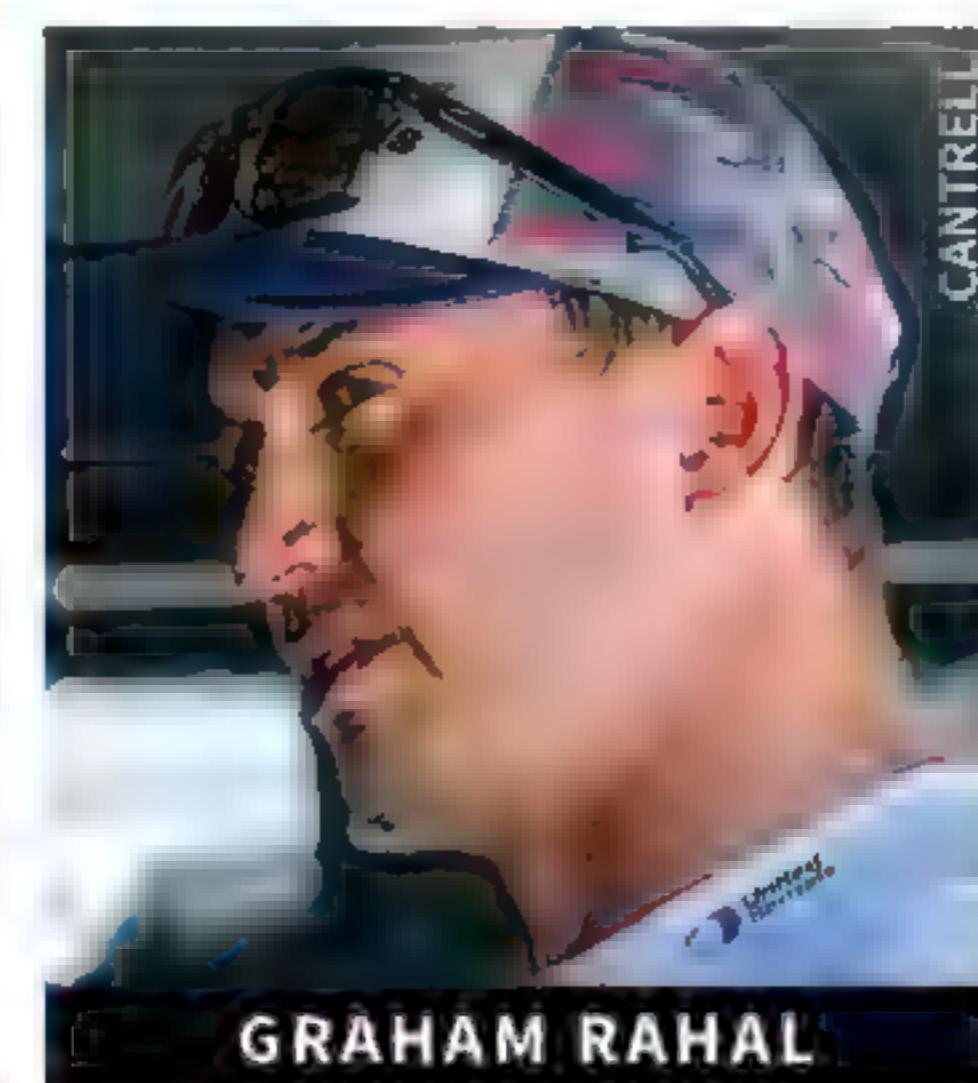
WILL POWER



MARCUS ERICSSON



SIMON PAGENAUD



GRAHAM RAHAL



ALEXANDER ROSSI

6 Penske's collective move to a less knife-edge set-up hurt his ultimate pace – his prime quality – in the season's middle third, but he rediscovered his form. Bad luck (Detroit, Laguna Seca) continues to stalk him, as do occasional mistakes.

7 A fine and decisive battler, he may always be let down by errors in qualifying leaving him with too much work. But his second win, at Nashville, proved he can handle severe pressure, and we expect more victories in 2022.

8 The 2016 champion's seventh and final year at Penske was one of his disappointing ones, with only two podiums. But he made fewer mistakes than his team-mates, and in the Indy 500 he was sensational as he clawed through the field.

9 If he could start higher consistently, he'd be top five in the points every year. Despite patchy – at times mediocre – qualifying form, he somehow delivered seven top-five finishes. Maybe his new team-mates will help RLL unlock that one-lap pace.

10 You may regard his 2016 Indy 500 triumph as lucky, but he's paid off his dues in misfortune over the past two seasons. He lacks Herta's qualifying pace, but is an excellent racer, yet could muster only one podium in 2021.

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	PTS
1	Alex Palou (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing	1	17	4	7	3	2	15	3	1	3	7	27	20	1	2	4	549
2	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske	23	2	6	2	4	12	10	2	21	1	10	8	1	5	7	2	511
3	Pato O'Ward (MEX)	Arrow McLaren SP	4	19	3	1	15	4	3	1	9	8	13	5	2	14	5	27	487
4	Scott Dixon (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing	3	5	1	4	9	17	8	7	4	4	2	17	19	3	13	3	481
5	Colton Herta (USA)	Andretti Autosport	22	1	22	5	13	16	14	4	2	13	19	3	18	8	1	1	455
6	Marcus Ericsson (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing	8	7	19	12	10	11	1	9	6	2	1	9	9	7	6	28	435
7	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing	7	15	5	3	5	32	5	5	11	6	5	7	23	10	4	16	389
8	Simon Pagenaud (FRA)	Team Penske	12	3	10	6	6	3	12	8	18	14	21	16	8	21	8	5	383
9	Will Power (AUS)	Team Penske	2	8	14	13	11	30	20	6	3	25	14	1	3	13	26	10	357
10	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Andretti Autosport	9	21	8	20	7	29	7	13	7	5	17	4	17	2	25	6	332

11Takuma Sato (Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing) 324; 12Jack Harvey (Meyer Shank Racing) 308; 13Rinus van Kalmthout (Ed Carpenter Racing) 308; 14Scott McLaughlin (Team Penske) 305; 15Romain Grosjean (Dale Coyne Racing) 272; 16Sebastien Bourdais (AJ Foyt Enterprises) 258; 17Ryan Hunter-Reay (Andretti Autosport) 256; 18Conor Daly (Ed Carpenter Racing/Carlin) 235; 19Ed Jones (Dale Coyne Racing) 233; 20James Hinchcliffe (Andretti Autosport) 220; 21Felix Rosenqvist (Arrow McLaren SP) 205; 22Helio Castroneves (Meyer Shank Racing) 158; 23Dalton Kellett (AJ Foyt Enterprises) 148; 24Santino Ferrucci (Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing) 146; 25Max Chilton (Carlin) 134; 26Jimmie Johnson (Chip Ganassi Racing) 108; 27Ed Carpenter (Ed Carpenter Racing) 107; 28Tony Kanaan (Chip Ganassi Racing) 96; 29Oliver Askew (Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing/Ed Carpenter Racing/AJ Foyt Enterprises) 61; 30Juan Pablo Montoya (Arrow McLaren SP) 53; 31Sage Karam (Dreyer & Reinbold Racing) 53; 32Pietro Fittipaldi (Dale Coyne Racing) 34; 33JR Hildebrand (AJ Foyt Enterprises) 30; 34Cody Ware (Dale Coyne Racing) 26; 35Marco Andretti (Andretti Autosport) 22; 36Charlie Kimball (AJ Foyt Enterprises) 20; 37Christian Lundgaard (Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing) 19; 38Callum Iott (Juncos Hollinger Racing) 18; 39Ryan Norman (Dale Coyne Racing) 10; 40Stefan Wilson (Andretti Autosport) 10; 41Simona de Silvestro (Paretta Autosport) 10; 42Kevin Magnussen (Arrow McLaren SP) 7; 43RC Enerson (Top Gun Racing) 5.



THE THIRD GENERATION ON THE PATH TO THE WRC

After Jimmy, Colin and Alister comes Max... Meet the 17-year-old who's setting out in Australia to conquer the world of rallying

TOM HOWARD

Rarely has a surname defined a sport as McRae does with rallying. The famous family dynasty has lit up stages across the globe, putting the World Rally Championship on the map in Great Britain, and now there is a third-generation McRae looking to follow in the footsteps of Jimmy, Colin and Alister.

Nine-thousand miles away from the family's natural Scottish habitat, a new breed of McRae is starting out on a long rallying journey in Australia, one he wishes will result in bringing arguably the sport's most famous name back to the WRC. Max McRae is the son of former WRC driver Alister, nephew to the late 1995 world champion Colin, and grandson of five-time British Rally champion Jimmy. To say he comes from good rallying stock is an understatement, and it was perhaps inevitable that he would pick up the rallying bug.

This year, aged 17, he's been competing in the Australian Rally Championship, but he already has an ultimate dream in mind. "As long as I'm in a race car and doing the thing I love, that's the main thing," says McRae. "But I definitely want to do rallying and follow the family name and what my family has done. One hundred percent, that is the goal, to do the World Rally Championship – that is the dream."

The road to the WRC dream began at the age of six, when Max moved to Perth, Australia with his father Alister, and it wasn't long before motorsport emerged as his goal in life. It's safe to say that he wasn't short of inspiration thanks to his successful father and the mark left by his global superstar uncle Colin.

As soon as he was old enough, Max started go-karting

At least Aussie rallying is drier and less windy than the McRae clan's native Scottish roads...



aged seven at a local circuit in Perth, before going on to win six Western Australia state titles. In 2019, aged 14, a move to cars beckoned, aided by winning the Arise Racing Driver Search competition, judged by 2011 Bathurst 1000 winner Nick Percat. The prize was a fully funded drive in state-based Formula 1000 single-seater

“JUST BEFORE WE WERE ABOUT TO START THE SEASON, THE FIRST WAVE OF COVID HIT”

racing but, thanks to the spread of COVID-19 and the cancellation of the series, what eventuated was a couple of races in a Radical sportscar, the last of those coming at Wanneroo Raceway later this month.

“Unfortunately, just before we were about to start the season, that was when the first proper wave of COVID hit pretty much the whole world, so that got put on pause for a year,” says McRae. “Instead of doing the F1000 we’ve done some races in a Radical, and it’s been going well. I’ve been winning the last few races but we’ve had some cancellations, and you wouldn’t believe it, but they’ve been cancelled due to the weather in Australia. It’s been too wet.”

But circuit racing’s loss is rallying’s gain, as McRae has now elected to focus fully on following in the well-trodden path left by his relatives. While COVID continues to wreak havoc in Australia through various >>

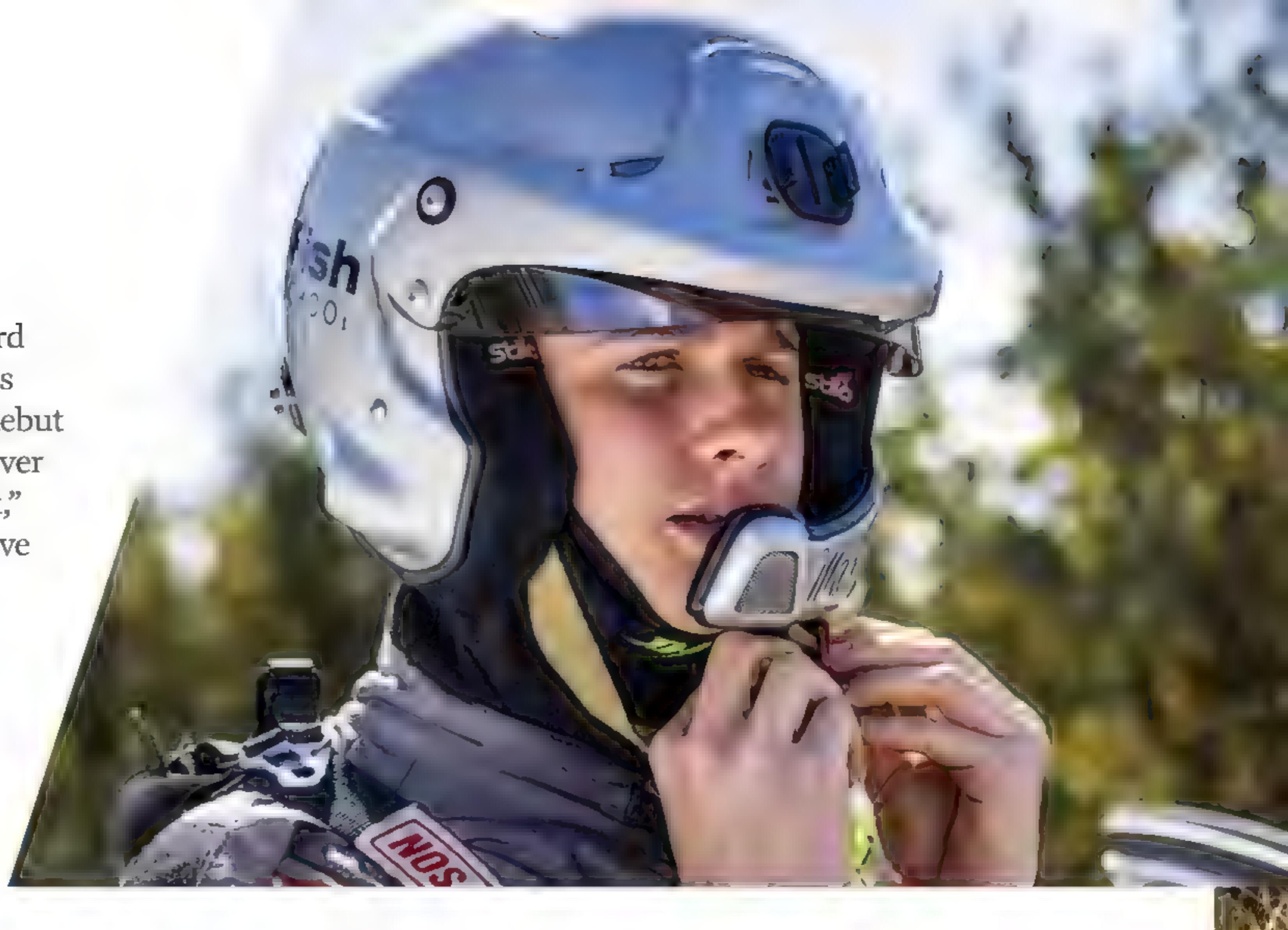
state lockdowns, McRae has managed to purchase an R2-spec Ford Fiesta, similar to those used in the Junior WRC. After a delay in its arrival from Spain, he made his Australian Rally Championship debut in May. "It [the Ford] took quite a while to arrive – we ordered it over Christmas [2020] – but as soon as it arrived I was straight onto it," he says. McRae has already enjoyed success in the two-wheel-drive Fiesta, finishing second in class at his first national event, Rally Queensland in May. But a second wave of COVID has thwarted

"THE NAME DOES GIVE EXPOSURE, BUT I'VE GOT TO WORK TO KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE"

his national championship plans, leaving McRae to resort to outings in the Western Australia Rally Championship. It has, however, resulted in a reincarnation of one of rallying's most iconic double acts: McRae driving a four-wheel drive Subaru.

"Of course, as a racing driver you love whatever car you're in and whatever you're doing," says McRae. "I think a lot of people agree that they want to see me in the rally cars, so that's the route I will like to go down. We were meant to do the whole Australian Rally Championship this year and we did the second round in Queensland, which was the first round for me, and it went really well and I ended up taking second in the two-wheel-drive class and second junior in my first national event, so that was really good. We were hoping to get a few more rounds this year but it has pretty much all been cancelled. We have some local gravel events in the Western Australian Championship, so I will get some seat time here and hopefully next year I will go back up to the national level again."

McRae is not the first youngster to try to follow in the footsteps of a famous motorsport father – or indeed uncle or grandad – and won't be the last. But embarking on a rally career with his background and the McRae name brings pressure and expectation, although he has shown maturity beyond his years in dealing with the added attention that comes with it. He is also well equipped to cope with any challenges thrown at him by having Alister alongside for experience and guidance.



But what is perhaps most admirable is that, despite the doors the name may open, Max is down to earth and realises that hard work both on and away from the stages is the only way to achieve his lofty goals.

"It is very special [to be a McRae]," says Max. "It's a bit weird now that I'm coming through the ranks. I get a lot of messages and mentioned in some stuff, so it's a bit strange to get used to. The name won't carry me through the ranks in rallying; I've got to work as hard as everyone else, and all the other kids in motorsport that are my age, to get to the top. The name does also help as it does give me some exposure, but I've got to work to keep the dream alive."

"Off stages and track it is a bit different. You've always got that thought in the back of your head that you have got to get the results that you've been set up to do. But when you are on the track, you do what you're capable of – if that is winning, you go out to win, and if it's not, you do the best you can and just improve for the next time."

So how important is it to Max to have ex-WRC Hyundai and Mitsubishi ace Alister in his corner? "He's all right, he gets a bit boring to be honest!" he jokes. "No, he's good. He has brought me up through the ranks and he's taught me everything I need to know. Especially having him and my grandfather Jimmy, I couldn't ask for better teachers or a better family. They've taught me and they will keep teaching me until I've overtaken them."

"If we go testing he will sit with me to see how I'm going. He does

Pressing on in
Colin McRae's 1997
Safari-winning
Impreza WRC



MAX



McRae Jr has already shown promise in Fiesta

whatever he can to improve me even if it's just little things. But he only needs to hear the sound of the cars and he has to jump in. He can't do a test session without jumping in the cars once or twice."

As Max admits, he has the best teachers out there to assist in achieving this dream, but this is the very start of a long-and-winding road to the promised land, which in his eyes is the WRC. Next year the plan is to complete a full season in the Australian Rally Championship, but after that McRae has his eyes firmly fixed on progressing to Europe and the Junior WRC. "I really hope [we can do a full season in ARC]," he points out. "We've been out of it for a while [due to COVID], it's only my second season in rallying, and hopefully next year we will get to some bigger rallies and get some more seat time. Of course, I'd love to get to Europe and especially the Junior WRC. That would be a real big goal to set up. You always get the money factor coming into it and we've got really good partners. They will carry me a long way and hopefully we can get to Europe in the next couple of years."

Reaching the WRC is notoriously difficult, and a challenge made increasingly harder with fewer seats at the top table. But the successes of Kalle Rovanpera and Oliver Solberg, both sons of former rally greats and who have landed factory drives at Toyota and Hyundai respectively, has provided yet further inspiration to bring the McRae name back to the WRC. "I'm always looking at Rovanpera and Oliver and watching them going through the ranks," he says. "Even when I was go-karting I was watching them and thinking, 'That's what I could be doing if I put the hard work in.'" *

DRIVING UNCLE COLIN'S FAMOUS SUBARU



If ever Max McRae needed any inspiration to achieve his World Rally Championship dream, then a drive in his late uncle Colin's 1997 Subaru Impreza WRC should do the trick.

In 2019, McRae was lucky to drive the Subaru that won the 1997 Safari Rally in the hands of Colin and co-driver Nicky Grist for a special film that pitched Max, father Alister and grandad Jimmy against the clock on a stage in the Welsh forests. While Alister came out on top, Max, then aged 15 and driving a WRC car for the first time, put in a time two seconds faster than Jimmy.

"You are kinda lost for words," says Max. "If I did it again now I would really understand how

much it means. I was a bit younger then, so it seemed like a really expensive race car, but now I understand more what goes into rallying. Even then the car just took my breath away. I couldn't believe that the car was standing in front of me. You always watch it on videos. I thought it was a dream – I couldn't believe it was there let alone getting to drive it.

"Being there with Nicky Grist and my grandfather and lot of my family, it was really special. Hearing the cars going into the forest and dad driving them how they shouldn't be driven, it was really special. I'd love to do it again one day."

Conway and co put one hand on another world crown

Better tyre wear for Mike Conway, Jose Maria Lopez and Kamui Kobayashi brought the Toyota trio its third win from five rounds

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP motorsport IMAGES



The two Toyotas were barely a second apart at the end of the opening stint of Saturday's Bahrain 6 Hours, and had twice swapped positions in the laps leading up to their first stops. It looked like it was going to be another close one between the Japanese manufacturer's Le Mans Hybrids, but by the end of the following stint the die had been cast in the favour of championship-leading trio Mike Conway, Jose Maria Lopez and Kamui Kobayashi.

Conway had dropped back behind Sébastien Buemi on his in-lap and then lost four seconds in the pits to Brendon Hartley, who'd taken over the sister car. Ten laps after the stops, at which both Toyotas took left-side tyres only, the Brit was ahead, and 20 laps later, when the two GR010 HYBRIDS came into the pits for the second time, he was more than a dozen seconds to the good.

Put simply, the #7 Toyota looked after its tyres better through a double stint than the #8 Buemi shared with Hartley and Kazuki Nakajima. Buemi and his team-mates had the pace through the first stint on a set of Michelin, but crucially not at the end of the second.

That ultimately determined the outcome of the first leg of the Bahrain double-header that closes out this year's six-round World Endurance Championship. The cause of the drivers of #8 wasn't helped by a couple of delays in the pits, the first in the second hour when the car had to be manoeuvred into position behind the sister car, and the second bang on four hours when the front-left didn't go on cleanly. The thread of the captive nut incorporated into the wheel was damaged, and a new wheel and tyre had to be brought from the heating ovens. The time loss in the pits explained a

slightly unrepresentative 51s margin between the two Toyotas, but this was a race that the drivers of #7 deservedly won.

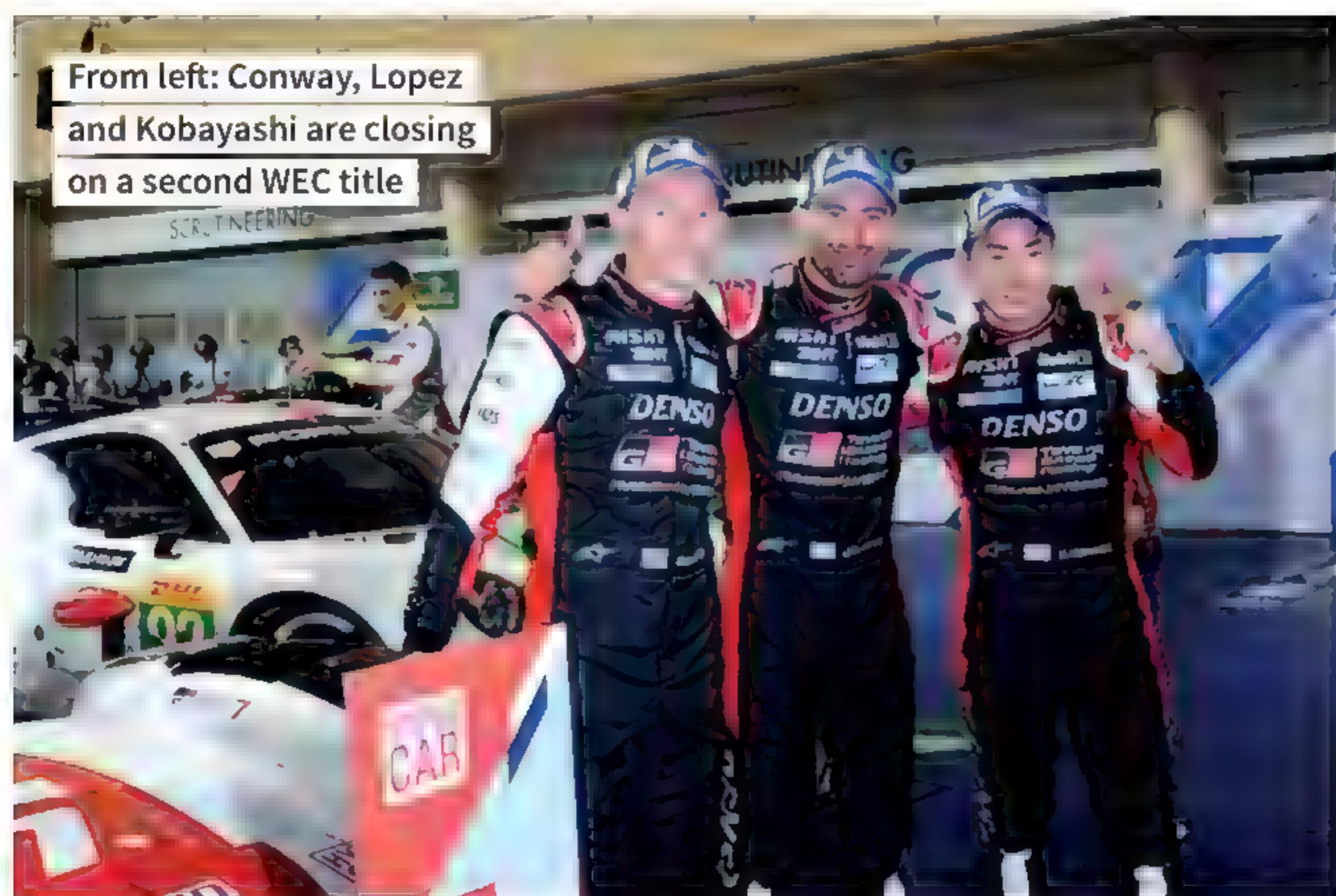
Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe technical director Pascal Vasselon had predicted that tyre degradation would be the determining factor on a track that is always hard on rubber, even more so last weekend. This was the first Bahrain WEC race to start and finish in daylight. "Between our two cars clearly the difference has been made on tyre degradation," he explained. "Two times in the race #8 has had very big tyre degradation and lost contact with #7. It has to be down to car set-up."

That's something the team needs to understand ahead of this weekend's eight-hour series finale around the 3.363-mile Bahrain International Circuit. "One of our homework items," he called it.

The winning Toyota had a relatively trouble-free race, though Lopez did suffer a braking problem believed to have been caused by glazing of a front brake disc and had a little off at Turn 1. Its only other problem was a lack of pace in qualifying: Hartley beat Kobayashi by four tenths to notch up a first pole of the season for #8. The Japanese driver complained of understeer.

Toyota had gone into the first race at Bahrain believing it was facing a real threat from Alpine in the three-car Hypercar class in the absence of the Glickenhaus LMHs. The French manufacturer's grandfathered LMP1 car weighed in 110kg lighter than Toyota's LMH under the latest Balance of Performance, a fact that would, it reckoned, give an advantage in terms of tyre wear. What's more, it believed that the latest BoP tweaks and the increase in the ORECA design's fuel capacity for the Le Mans 24 Hours back in August would more or less bring it onto a par in terms of stint length, the Gibson-engined A480's Achilles' heel in the races leading up to the 24 Hours.

The Alpine driven by Nicolas Lapierre, Matthieu Vaxiviere and Andre Negrao wasn't, however, a factor last weekend as it trailed the Toyotas home a lap down in third. Vaxiviere kept the Japanese cars





“Two times in the race #8 has had very big tyre degradation. It has to be down to car set-up”

honest in the opening laps, staying within a couple of seconds for eight or so laps, only to drop away when a throttle problem hit the car before the first round of stops. What's more, the high temperatures had an effect on fuel consumption and the Alpine, once again, fell several laps short of its rivals on stint length. The Toyotas could hit 31 laps on their energy allocation, the Alpine no more than 28.

The Signatech team rolled the dice during two of the three Full Course Yellow virtual safety cars to try to mix up the strategy. The tactic was worth a go, reckoned team boss Philippe Sinault, but ultimately worked against his drivers. “You have to try to gamble when you are behind,” he said.

Kobayashi, Conway and Lopez now have one hand on the end-of-season WEC trophy. Victory in Bahrain 1 means their points lead is such that the Alpine needs to come into the equation for Buemi, Hartley and Nakajima to take the title. A victory for the drivers of #8 over the eight hours of this coming weekend's race would not be enough if the championship leaders finish second, even with points and a half on offer.

Should #7 take the top spot in qualifying, the final podium positions give its drivers the title no matter what. If Alpine is fastest, then Conway and co win on countback with third place. It's also worth remembering that LMP2 machinery can no longer deprive cars competing in the top class of points. A delayed finish behind some P2 cars would still give them third in the Hypercar class.



WRT wins again in LMP2

Le Mans class victory or no, WRT didn't look like potential LMP2 winners for much of the Bahrain meeting. The Belgian squad's ORECA-Gibson 07 shared by Robin Frijns, Ferdinand Habsburg and Charles Milesi struggled through free practice and to a lesser extent in qualifying. Yet the trio claimed WRT's first win in a regular WEC round with ease.

Their car was the most consistent performer in what is now an all-ORECA field over the full six hours. United Autosports' 07 was a match for Frijns and co in the opening half of the race and the third-placed #28 Jota car flew over the second half, but neither of the British teams strung together the kind of race they needed to beat WRT.

Milesi ended up seventh in class in qualifying, though his starting position was slightly misleading. His quickest time would have put him third had it not been scrubbed out for a track limits >>



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violation. Unlike the other frontrunners, WRT didn't go again on a second set of tyres. It still needed a dramatic turnaround for WRT to take the win and the lead in the P2 points with it.

"We were really fighting with the car to find the set-up in practice," said Frijns. "On Thursday we had really bad understeer, which then turned into oversteer. But in the race, all of a sudden, we had a car that performed like it should."

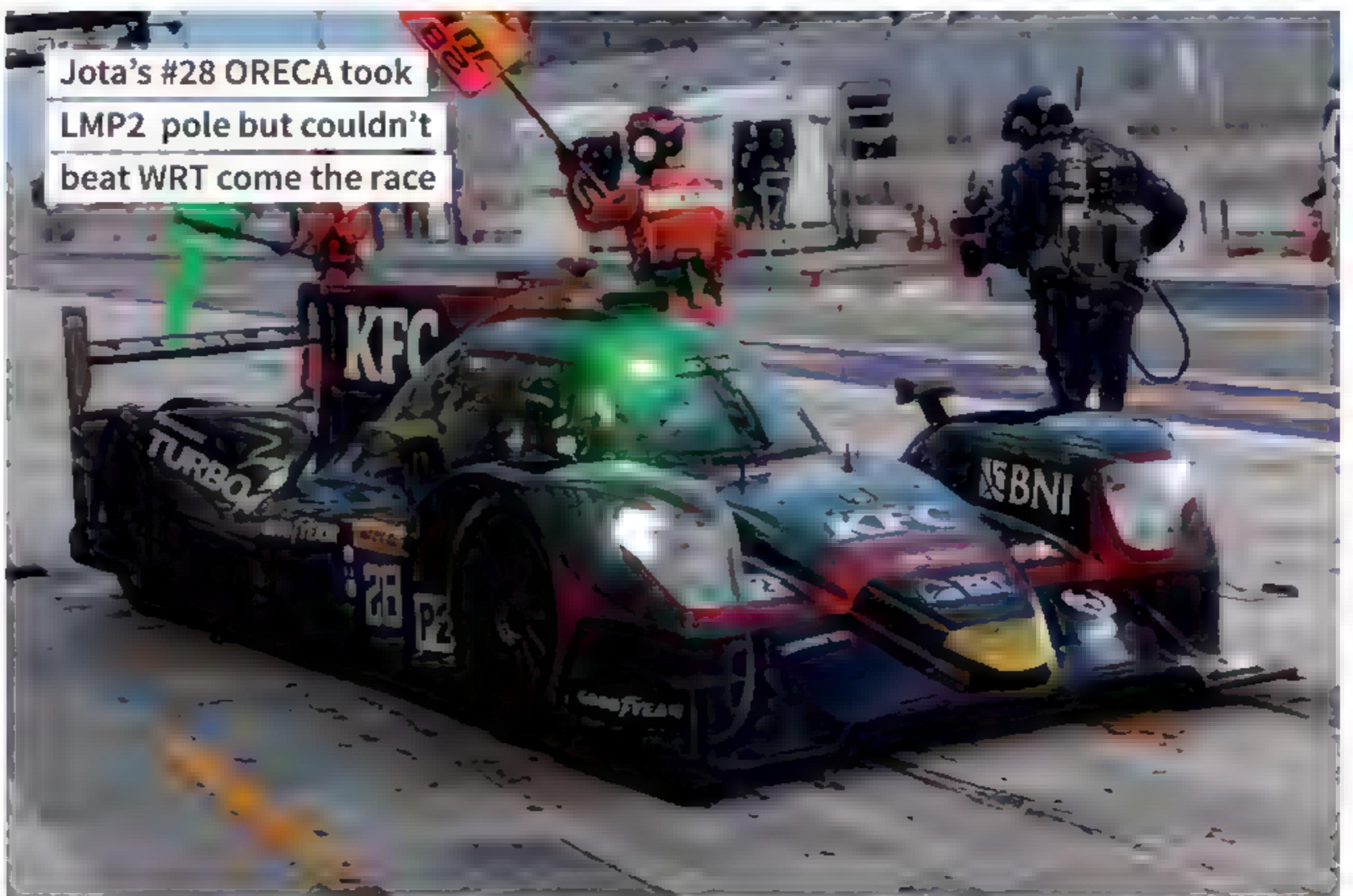
Habsburg made progress for WRT in the opening stint and then the car vaulted up to second during the first FCY on the two-hour mark when Frijns took over. On a fresh set of Goodyears he quickly moved past Alex Brundle, whose Inter Europol car was on stint-old rubber, to take a lead the WRT car would hold for all but four of the remaining laps.

Frijns, who returned to the wheel for the final stints, ended up over a minute clear of the pole-winning Jota car shared by Stoffel Vandoorne, Tom Blomqvist and Sean Gelael.

Gelael had lost time during his opening double when he spun after contact with Paul Dalla Lana's GTE Am Aston Martin, but Jota team boss Sam Hignett didn't believe that played a pivotal role in the outcome. "We wouldn't have beaten them; they had us on pace today," he said. "Second place was as good as it was going to get. WRT did a brilliant job to come through from where they were."

The second Jota entry driven by Antonio Felix da Costa, Anthony Davidson and Roberto Gonzalez "came alive", in Hignett's words, over the final three hours, but by then it was too far behind to have a shot at the win. Gonzalez, a true silver, dropped as low as eighth during his opening double, and then Davidson encountered mid-race braking problems when a ball of spent rubber lodged itself in the left rear cooling duct. The brake temperatures went sky high before things returned to normal when the debris was hooked out in the pits.

The United ORECA driven by Filipe Albuquerque, Phil Hanson





Buemi led from pole but the sister car had an edge on tyre wear

“Second was as good as it was going to get. WRT did a brilliant job from where they were”

and Fabio Scherer was right there for three hours only to lose its edge as the race progressed. It was only 11s down at the halfway mark and on the same tyre strategy as the WRT car, but was knocked off the podium by a flying da Costa in the final 10 laps. A 10s penalty after Albuquerque was adjudged to be the guilty party in a clash that spun a lapped Renger van der Zande around in the Inter Europol car didn’t aid its cause. “The penalty didn’t help, but in the second half of the race the pace went,” said United boss Richard Dean. “We’ve got to pull the car apart to find out what happened.”

Racing Team Nederland took fifth and won the Pro-Am sub-class with Giedo van der Garde, Job van Uitert and Frits van Eerd. Van der Garde made one of his trademark flying starts, propelling the TDS Racing-run ORECA from sixth on the grid to first inside two corners. Consistency over the race distance, however, was more important in its 1m20s margin over the Realteam ORECA on the other side of the TDS garage.

Porsche outpaces Ferrari in GTE Pro

The two factory Porsches were rarely separated by a second over the course of the Bahrain 6 Hours and never by more than five. It was pretty much the same for the two Ferraris. The only problem was that there were multiple seconds, 35 by the end of the race, between the white train and the red one. The reason for that was a highly contentious change in the Balance of Performance for the Italian cars in the run-up to the race.

It was contentious because it was outside the scope of the automatic BoP system introduced for 2017, which was meant to rid the paddock of the kind of squabbling that made an unwelcome return last week. Ferrari estimated that the downward change in the turbo boost pressure curve for the V8 in the back of its 488 GTE Evos robbed them of 25bhp. That’s double the change between races allowed under the auto system: it lays down a maximum adjustment of 10kW or 13.5bhp. That means the organisers – the FIA and the Automobile Club de l’Ouest – have invoked the so-called black ball rule to go beyond that.

Ferrari cried foul ahead of the race and again afterwards, GT boss Antonello Coletta calling the change “punitive”. James Calado, whose lead in the GTE Pro championship with Alessandro Pier Guidi was reduced to one point, reckoned it was just plain unfair. “We lacked so much power that there was nothing more we could do: this isn’t a fair fight for a world championship,” he said.

Ferrari tried to mix it up strategically by pitting out of sequence ➤

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“You’ve got to try something when you are so far off even if you know it’s not going to work”

during one of the FCYs, but to no avail. “You’ve got to try something when you are so far off the pace,” said Calado, “even if you know it’s probably not going to work.”

Given that one of the two car types competing full-time in GTE Pro in the WEC this year was clearly superior to the other and that one crew from each manufacturer was a long way ahead of the other in the championship battle, the finishing order at the end of the six hours was pretty much a foregone conclusion.

Kevin Estre and Neel Jani, Porsche’s best-placed crew in the points going into the Bahrain double-header, duly won from the closely following sister Porsche 911 RSR shared by Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz, which was just 0.7s down at the end. Bruni and Lietz played a supporting role and Jani expressed relief at the fact that he knew neither was going “to launch it down the inside” at any point.

Third place went to the championship-leading Ferrari crew of Pier Guidi and Calado by a couple of seconds from team-mates Miguel Molina and Daniel Serra. If you could have got odds on that top four with a bookmaker, it would have been worth betting the farm on it.

Porsche insisted it wasn’t as easy as it looked given the importance of tyre wear at this fixture. Alexander Stehlík, head of operations at the Porsche WEC squad, suggested the Manthey-run team was “on a knife edge” throughout the six hours. “We were always on the border of the temperature window of our tyre,” he explained. “We knew that if we had to go to the next [harder] one the pace would not be so good.”

Porsche, however, isn’t going into the second leg of the Bahrain double-header believing it has the championship in its pocket. Stehlík reckons it’s going to be an entirely different race given that half of the eight hours will take place under the cover of darkness. “With different ambient temperatures, it will be an entirely different race,” he said. “This time we raced from 11am to 5pm and next time we race from 2pm to 10pm. By 5pm the sun has gone down and you can push much more on the tyres.”

Ferrari begs to differ. “They’ve handed it to Porsche on a plate,” reckoned Calado.

The Italian marque is, of course, pushing for a BoP change. It remained unclear at press time what was going to happen for the simple reason that the FIA and the ACO refused to speak about the BoP, publicly or even privately to Ferrari. The manufacturer insisted that it had received no explanation for the draconian BoP it received ahead of Bahrain.



Aston ends Ferrari’s GTE Am run

The TF Sport Aston Martin squad finally broke AF Corse and Ferrari’s monopoly on the top spot in GTE Am this season. AF’s pair of full-season Am entries and the car it runs under the Cetilar banner had shared out the victories in the previous four races, but this time a TF Vantage GTE made it back into the winners’ circle for the first time since Le Mans in 2020.

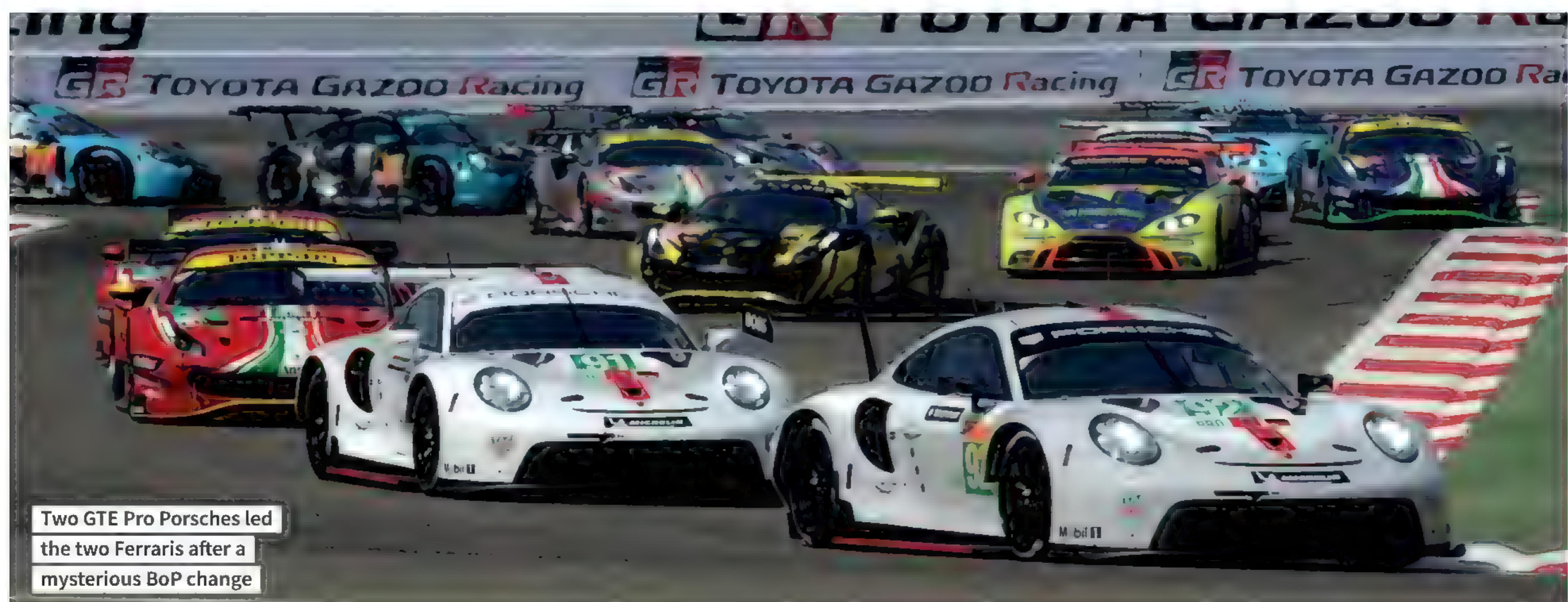
TF drivers Dylan Pereira, Felipe Fraga and Ben Keating took a 5.6s victory from the Dempsey-Proton Porsche 911 RSR shared by Matt Campbell, Jaxon Evans and Christian Ried. They might have won by more but for employing a strategy that usually works in their favour.

Keating started the race and completed two full stints to get through the one hour and 45 minute minimum driving time for a bronze-rated driver. The problem for TF was that it had already pitted when the first FCY arrived, whereas its rivals were able to take advantage of the yellows to bring their cars in.

The team reckoned it could have cost them as much as 35s, but Pereira was able to haul the car into the lead shortly after halfway. The Aston only fell off the top spot thereafter when it pitted, though both the lead Dempsey-Proton Porsche and the Project 1 car that finished third closed down its lead in the finishing stages.

The Ferrari wasn’t the same force as it had been at previous races after receiving a similar BoP hit to that of the Pro cars. Top Ferrari finishers were points leaders Nicklas Nielsen, Alessio Rovera and Francois Perrodo in fifth. *

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RESULTS WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 5/6, SAKHIR, BAHRAIN 6 HOURS, 30 OCTOBER (185 LAPS - 622.129 MILES)

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	CAR	CLASS	TIME
1	Mike Conway (GBR) Kamui Kobayashi (JPN) Jose Maria Lopez (ARG)	Toyota Gazoo Racing	Toyota GR010 HYBRID	Hypercar	6h00m33.356s
2	Sebastien Buemi (CHE) Kazuki Nakajima (JPN) Brendon Hartley (NZL)	Toyota Gazoo Racing	Toyota GR010 HYBRID	Hypercar	+51.401s
3	Matthieu Vaxiviere (FRA) Andre Negrao (BRA) Nicolas Lapierre (FRA)	Alpine Elf Matmut (Signatech)	Alpine-Gibson A480	Hypercar	-1 lap
4	Ferdinand Habsburg (AUT) Robin Frijns (NLD) Charles Milesi (FRA)	Team WRT	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-5 laps
5	Sean Gelael (IND) Stoffel Vandoorne (BEL) Tom Blomqvist (GBR)	Jota	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-5 laps
6	Roberto Gonzalez (MEX) Antonio Felix da Costa (PRT) Anthony Davidson (GBR)	Jota	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-5 laps
7	Phil Hanson (GBR) Fabio Scherer (CHE) Filipe Albuquerque (PRT)	United Autosports	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-5 laps
8	Giedo van der Garde (NLD) Frits van Eerd (NLD) Job van Uitert (NLD)	Racing Team Nederland (TDS)	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-7 laps
9	Beitske Visser (NLD) Sophia Florsch (DEU) Gabriel Aubry (FRA)	Richard Mille Racing (Signatech)	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-7 laps
10	Loic Duval (FRA) Esteban Garcia (CHE) Norman Nato (FRA)	Realteam Racing (TDS)	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-7 laps
11	Anders Fjordbach (DNK) Dennis Andersen (DNK) Robert Kubica (POL)	High Class Racing	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-8 laps
12	Renger van der Zande (NLD) Jakub Smiechowski (POL) Alex Brundle (GBR)	Inter Europol Competition	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-10 laps
13	Kevin Estre (FRA) Neel Jani (CHE)	Porsche GT Team (Manthey)	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Pro	-11 laps
14	Gianmaria Bruni (ITA) Richard Lietz (AUT)	Porsche GT Team (Manthey)	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Pro	-11 laps
15	Alessandro Pier Guidi (ITA) James Calado (GBR)	AF Corse	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Pro	-11 laps
16	Miguel Molina (ESP) Daniel Serra (BRA)	AF Corse	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Pro	-11 laps
17	Ben Keating (USA) Dylan Pereira (LUX) Felipe Fraga (BRA)	TF Sport	Aston Martin Vantage GTE	GTE Am	-13 laps
18	Christian Ried (DEU) Jaxon Evans (NZL) Matt Campbell (AUS)	Dempsey-Proton Racing	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Am	-13 laps
19	Egidio Perfetti (NOR) Matteo Cairoli (ITA) Riccardo Pera (ITA)	Team Project 1	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Am	-13 laps
20	Paul Dalla Lana (CAN) Augusto Farfus (BRA) Marcos Gomes (BRA)	Aston Martin Racing (Prodrive)	Aston Martin Vantage GTE	GTE Am	-13 laps
21	Miro Konopka (SVK) Oliver Webb (GBR) Kush Maini (IND)	ARC Bratislava	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-13 laps
22	Francois Perrodo (FRA) Nicklas Nielsen (DNK) Alessio Rovera (ITA)	AF Corse	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-13 laps
23	Michael Wainwright (GBR) Ben Barker (GBR) Tom Gamble (GBR)	GR Racing	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Am	-14 laps
24	Francesco Castellacci (ITA) Thomas Flohr (CHE) Giancarlo Fisichella (ITA)	AF Corse	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-14 laps
25	Sarah Bovy (BEL) Rahel Frey (CHE) Katherine Legge (GBR)	Iron Lynx	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-14 laps
26	Takeshi Kimura (JPN) Mikkel Jensen (DNK) Scott Andrews (AUS)	Kessel Racing	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-15 laps
27	Roberto Lacorte (ITA) Giorgio Sernagiotto (ITA) Antonio Fuoco (ITA)	Cetilar Racing (AF)	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-15 laps
28	Tomonobu Fujii (JPN) Satoshi Hoshino (JPN) Andrew Watson (GBR)	D'Station Racing	Aston Martin Vantage GTE	GTE Am	-16 laps
29	Rino Mastromaridi (ITA) Andrea Piccini (ITA) Matteo Cressoni (ITA)	Iron Lynx	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	GTE Am	-16 laps
30	Ben Hanley (GBR) Henrik Hedman (SWE) Juan Pablo Montoya (COL)	DragonSpeed USA	ORECA-Gibson 07	LMP2	-19 laps
31	Khaled Al Qubaisi (ARE) Adrien de Leener (BEL) Julien Andlauer (FRA)	Dempsey-Proton Racing	Porsche 911 RSR	GTE Am	-19 laps

In each car, first-named driver started each race.

Winners' average speed 103.528mph. **Fastest lap** Buemi 1m48.926s, 111.142mph.

LMP2 Frijns 1m53.215s, 106.931mph. **GTE Pro** Bruni 1m58.590s, 102.085mph. **GTE Am** Campbell 1m59.263s, 101.509mph.

QUALIFYING

1 Hartley 1m47.049s; **2** Kobayashi 1m47.447s; **3** Negrao 1m48.003s; **4** Blomqvist 1m49.932s; **5** Albuquerque 1m49.994s; **6** da Costa 1m50.198s; **7** Duval 1m50.559s; **8** van der Zande 1m50.658s; **9** van der Garde 1m50.942s; **10** Milesi 1m51.043s; **11** Hanley 1m51.312s; **12** Webb 1m51.487s; **13** Kubica 1m51.506s; **14** Florsch 1m51.736s; **15** Estre 1m56.144s; **16** Bruni 1m56.178s; **17** Molina 1m57.327s; **18** Pier Guidi 1m57.573s; **19** Mastromaridi 1m58.687s; **20** Dalla Lana 1m59.331s; **21** Perfetti 1m59.404s; **22**

Lacorte 1m59.410s; **23** Flohr 1m59.534s;

24 Keating 1m59.538s; **25** Al Qubaisi 1m59.923s; **26** Perrodo 2m00.263s; **27** Ried 2m00.294s; **28** Hoshino 2m00.300s; **29** Bovy 2m00.457s; **30** Wainwright 2m00.939s; **31** Kimura 2m01.877s.

CHAMPIONSHIP

Hypercar drivers
1 Lopez/Kobayashi/Conway 145; **2** Hartley/Nakajima/Buemi 130; **3** Negrao/Vaxiviere/Lapierre 105; **4** Richard Westbrook/Romain Dumas 53; **5** Franck Mailleux 39; **6** Ryan Briscoe 38.

Hypercar manufacturers

1 Toyota Gazoo Racing 167; **2** Alpine Elf Matmut 105; **3** Glickenhaus Racing 37. **LMP2 drivers**
1 Milesi/Habsburg/Frijns 113; **2** Gelael/Vandoorne/Blomqvist 108; **3** Davidson/da Costa/Gonzalez 96; **4** Hanson 88.

GTE drivers

1 Pier Guidi/Calado 139; **2** Estre/Jani 138; **3** Bruni/Lietz 93; **4** Serra/Molina 69; **5** Michael Christensen 60; **6** Come Ledogar 50. **GTE manufacturers**
1 Porsche 231; **2** Ferrari 230.



GTE Am drivers

1 Rovera/Perrodo/Nielsen 112; **2** Keating/Pereira/Fraga 90.5; **3** Castellacci/Fisichella/Flohr 59; **4** Fuoco/Sernagiotto/Lacorte 56.



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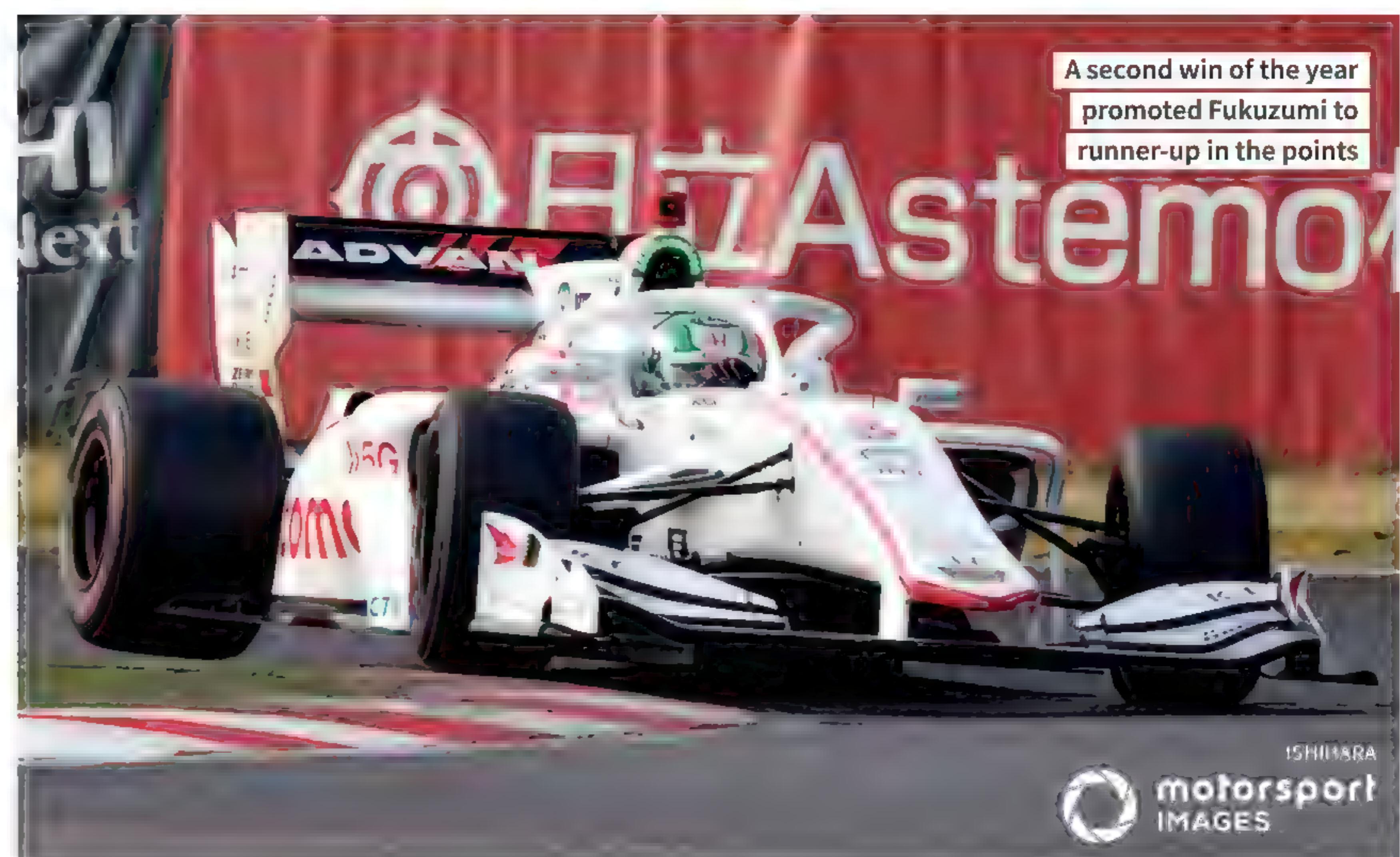
Fukuzumi bags final spoils of the season

SUPER FORMULA
SUZUKA (JPN)
31 OCTOBER
ROUND 7/7

Nirei Fukuzumi scored his second career Super Formula victory at the Suzuka season finale, the Dandelion Honda driver grabbing the win by passing Mugen rival Tomoki Nojiri – who had sealed the title last time out at Motegi – shortly after the pitstops.

The pair had been promoted to first and second, Nojiri leading Fukuzumi, when polesitter and early leader Nobuharu Matsushita (B-Max) received a drivethrough penalty for moving slightly before the start.

Fukuzumi was first to pit on lap 11 of 30, with Nojiri following suit one lap later, but a slow out-lap for the latter allowed Fukuzumi to sweep past at the Esses. Ryo Hirakawa (Impul) left his stop until two laps later and was able to overcut Nojiri to take second, but he was powerless to threaten Fukuzumi.



Yuhi Sekiguchi went from 14th on the grid to fourth courtesy of leaving his pitstop until the closing stages, helping secure a first teams' title since 2010 for Impul.

Fifth place for Motegi winner Hiroki Otsu guaranteed the Mugen driver Rookie of the Year honours, while Kenta Yamashita (Kondo) had his best finish of the term in sixth ahead of team-mate Sacha Fenestraz and Giuliano Alesi (TOM'S).

Toshiki Oyu (Nakajima Racing) had started second but finished 11th after an early run-in with Nojiri at the Esses that sent him across the gravel. Nojiri earned a five-second penalty for the contact, but this didn't affect his finishing position.

JAMIE KLEIN

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Kerbs create Prema implosion as R-ace GP picks up the title

FORMULA REGIONAL EUROPEAN
MONZA (ITA)
30-31 OCTOBER
ROUND 10/10

The use of sausage kerbs to enforce track limits for single-seaters and team-mates wiping out in a battle for victory were the key talking points as the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine season drew to a dramatic close at Monza.

Prema Powerteam's polesitting Dino Beganovic was chasing his first win of the year in race two, having held the

lead at two safety restarts and while under pressure from stablemate David Vidales, when the flashpoint arrived.

Vidales had a sniff around the outside on entry to the Roggia Chicane, then was squeezed out as both elected to cut the second apex. Vidales kept his foot in as he rejoined the circuit but clattered over the sleeping policeman and was vaulted into the air. His front axle slammed down onto the asphalt and, out of control, he took out Beganovic. The Swede careered into the barrier and then drifted back onto the racing line as the field tried to pick its way through the melee.

That allowed Isack Hadjar to dive through from third for what would become the win over Paul Aron as the safety car reappeared to control events to the flag. It meant the R-ace GP team bagged a brace and the crown, with Hadrien David having led a 1-2-3 for the outfit in the opener. David had dominated race one from pole as Gregoire Saucy bowed out of his title-winning campaign with a fourth and a 10th.



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WEEKEND WINNERS

SUPER FORMULA
SUZUKA (JPN)
 Nirei Fukuzumi
 Dandelion Racing (Dallara-Honda SF19)

FORMULA REGIONAL EUROPEAN
MONZA (ITA)
Race 1 Hadrien David (below)
 R-ace GP
Race 2 Isack Hadjar
 R-ace GP

LAMBORGHINI SUPER TROFEO
WORLD FINALS
MISANO (ITA)
Races 1 & 2
 Karol Basz/Mattia Michelotto, VS Racing

EUROPEAN LAMBORGHINI
SUPER TROFEO
MISANO (ITA)
Races 1 & 2
 Daan Pijl/Danny Kroes, Bonaldi Motorsport



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De Pasquale resumes in top form

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

SYDNEY (AUS)

30-31 OCTOBER

ROUND 8/12

Anton De Pasquale enjoyed a coming-of-age weekend as the 2021 Australian Supercars season resumed at Sydney Motorsport Park.

The Dick Johnson Racing Ford ace blasted out of the blocks after the three-month lay-off, dominating the first of four consecutive events at the circuit. He topped all but one track session across the three days, including three poles and two wins.

De Pasquale made light work of the first heat on Saturday night with a controlled lights-to-flag win, just his second since joining DJR this season. Shane van Gisbergen's Triple Eight Holden finished second, while Brodie Kostecki rounded out the podium after a scrap with Nick Percat.

The first of two Sunday races was a disaster for De Pasquale, who dropped to seventh in the space of two corners after a poor start from pole. He recovered to fifth on the road at the finish but was later disqualified when DJR fitted a tyre allocated to Will Davison's car during his pitstop.

Davison, meanwhile, went close to his first victory since returning to DJR but was denied by an electrical issue that left him flying blind with no dash. That opened the door for van Gisbergen to jump him during the stops to score his 12th win of the season.

De Pasquale was back on top in the final race, despite a tyre scare forcing him into an early stop. That left him vulnerable to Will Brown late on, however De Pasquale cleverly let Brown catch him to ensure he had just enough tyre life up his sleeve to hold the Erebus driver off in the closing laps.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN

WEEKEND WINNERS

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

SYDNEY (AUS)

Races 1 & 3 Anton De Pasquale

Dick Johnson Racing

(Ford Mustang)

Race 2 Shane van Gisbergen

Triple Eight (Holden Commodore ZB)

NASCAR CUP

MARTINSVILLE (USA)

Alex Bowman

Hendrick Motorsports

(Chevrolet Camaro)

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES

MARTINSVILLE (USA)

Noah Gragson

JR Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)

NASCAR TRUCK SERIES

MARTINSVILLE (USA)

Zane Smith (below)

GMS Racing (Chevrolet Silverado)



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Bowman wins, Hamlin rages, Penskes out

NASCAR CUP

MARTINSVILLE (USA)

31 OCTOBER

ROUND 35/36

Alex Bowman turned out to be the surprise winner in the NASCAR Cup playoff race at Martinsville Speedway, much to the dismay of Denny Hamlin.

After battling side-by-side with Hamlin for several tours for the lead, Bowman got loose and spun Hamlin up the track as he grabbed the lead on lap 494 of 501. He then held off a wild charge by Kyle Busch and several other playoff contenders over a two-lap restart to earn his fourth win of the season.

However, while Bowman was doing



a celebratory burnout, Hamlin drove his Toyota Camry into the picture and the two cars ending up facing off nose-to-nose.

"I just got loose underneath [him]," said Hendrick's Bowman. "I'm not trying to crash the guy. I got under him fair, under him clean. I just got sideways, spun him out. It was obviously unintentional."

Despite finishing 24th, Hamlin was still able to transfer to the Championship Four this weekend at Phoenix by points, where he will compete for the 2021 title against this season's nine-time race winner Kyle

Larson, reigning champion Chase Elliott and his Joe Gibbs Racing team-mate Martin Truex Jr.

Hamlin added: "When you look at the four that are in it, I think it's the best four that you could possibly put in that race. I think all would be deserving champions."

Eliminated from further title contention were Busch and all three Team Penske drivers, Brad Keselowski, Joey Logano and Ryan Blaney.

JIM UTTER

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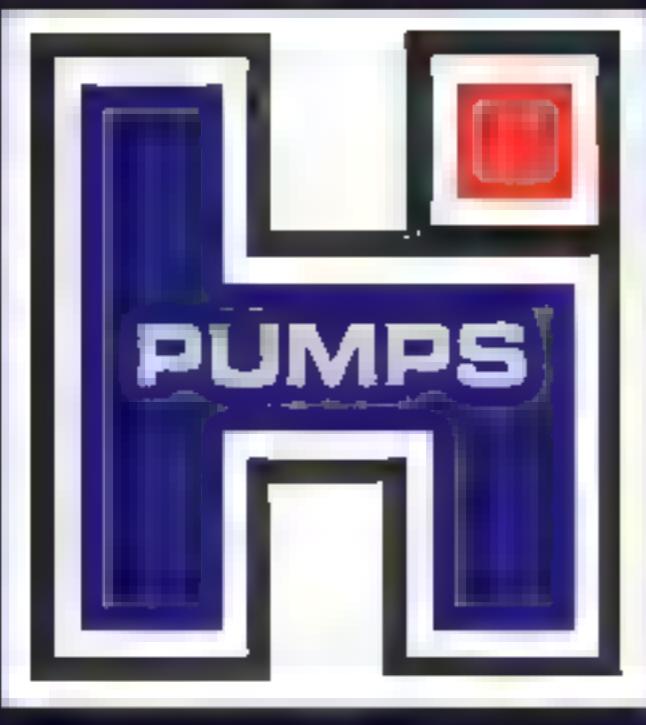


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GB4 Ten teams pledge interest in new single-seater series

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Sharp's shock Festival win

Chaotic final results in giant-killing performance in event's 50th edition



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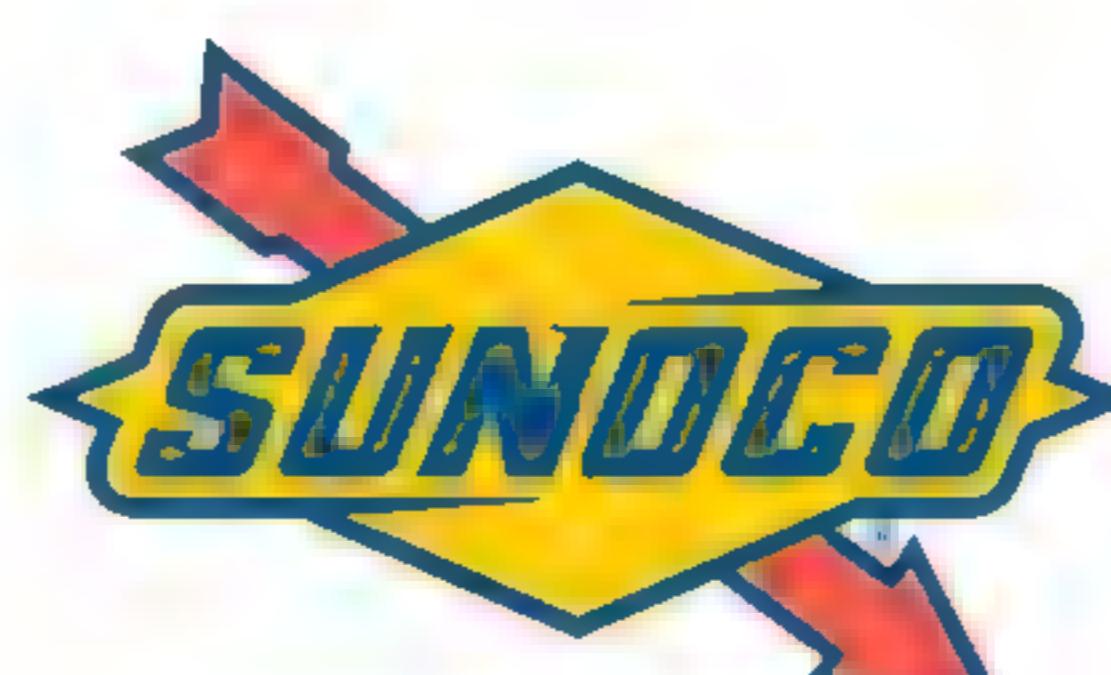
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NEW FIESTA JUNIOR CAR WITH COOKSPORT-SUPPLIED PARTS

FIESTA JUNIOR

A new Fiesta Junior car will be introduced next season, featuring control parts supplied by British Touring Car star Josh Cook's Cooksport operation.

Just two years ago, the British Racing & Sports Car Club-operated series was in the doldrums when it featured a tiny four-car grid for its season finale. But now, after a significant amount of work from the club, numbers have grown significantly, with many events featuring up to four times the entries of that 2019 event.

Organisers feel that to take the championship to the next level a new car needs to be introduced and, from next season, a 1.6-litre Sigma-engined Mk7 Fiesta will be eligible to race alongside the existing Mk6 machines.

"Along with Laura Payne, the coordinator, the club have put a huge amount of effort into Fiesta Junior and we have grown, but we believe the restriction on taking it to the next step is the car," explained head of BRSCC formulae development Greg Graham. "It's quite old now and it's getting more difficult to find good donor cars."

"We expect this new car to gain some interest. Our senior Fiesta Championship has proven the Mk7 1.6 Sigma-engined car is reliable, plentiful and also cheap,

and this gave us the confidence to base our next-generation Junior car on that model. It's been a complex process to get to this stage and we believe we will introduce something the marketplace wants."

Cooksport will supply a wealth of control parts for the cars, including the engines, in a bid to reduce costs and make the series more accessible, expanding on an existing partnership it has with the BRSCC. It is estimated that the full build kit will cost £13,490 plus VAT.

"We've had a relationship with Josh and Cooksport for a number of years – they already supply parts to Fiesta Junior and senior Fiestas," said Graham. "Josh is fully behind it and he's going to be personally testing the car in the next 10 days or so. That level of experience adds to the credibility of the championship."

Cook added: "I'm very fond of club-level motorsport and especially junior tin-top racing – after all, it's where I started my racing career! I think it's a really important proving ground for young people who are looking to have a career in car racing, and who need the assurances that they can begin their careers in a well-managed championship at an affordable level."

The new car is due to be on display at MotorsportDays LIVE at Silverstone, which starts tomorrow (Friday).

STEPHEN LICKORISH

TESTS HELD FOR McLAREN YOUNG DRIVER HOPEFULS

BRITISH GT

McLaren has staged its latest evaluation test to determine places on its Driver Development Programme in 2022, with 14 drivers put under the microscope at Snetterton.

Under the eyes of factory drivers Rob Bell, Ben Barnicoat, Joe Osborne and Euan Hankey, the hopefuls had two free practice sessions on Tuesday last week in a McLaren 570S GT4, then a qualifying and race run on Wednesday. They were also subjected to simulator and fitness assessments at iZone Driver Performance, alongside media interviews.

McLaren will again place the four successful candidates with a DDP partner team, for which McLaren Automotive has started a tender process, in the British GT Championship's GT4 division. In a new development, the best performer at the end of 2022 will be awarded a contract with McLaren for 2023.

Among those vying for a place are two 2021 champions – GT4 European winner Bailey Voisin and Ginetta Junior champion Aston Millar. Two drivers who have taken British GT4 class wins in McLaren's – Gus Bowers and James Kell (below) – were also present.

Among the intriguing names on the list were karting star Marijn Kremers, who won the Jacques Villeneuve-backed FEED Racing shootout in 2019 and who was due to race in British F4 before switching to the French series, 2020 British GT4 frontrunner Patrick Kibble and last year's Historic Formula Ford champion Pierre Livingston.

JAMES NEWBOLD



JEP/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

Ten teams set out stall to join GB4 grid

GB4

Ten teams have declared an interest in joining the new-for-2022 GB4 Championship, including two National Formula Ford squads.

Oldfield Motorsport and Kevin Mills Racing have successfully run FF1600 cars for many years, including respective outright wins at the Formula Ford Festival and Walter Hayes Trophy. Both squads are set to join the new championship, which was given approval last month by the country's governing body, Motorsport UK, to run 15-year-olds.

The MotorSport Vision-organised series will use the Gen1 Tatuus F4-To14 chassis hitherto raced in many series including the Italian and German. The new category is designed to be an entry point to single-seaters, with budgets expected to be between £90,000 and £120,000, and the champion receiving £50,000, which they can use to race in GB3 in 2023.

"We've been waiting for something to come along for a few years," said Oldfield Motorsport owner James Oldfield. "When we started, MSV F4 was there in our first



season but, for me, it was too soon to move – it was probably too much of a jump to do it. When British F3 came along, I went to look at the cars but I thought this is again a big jump.

"Since then, we've focused on Formula Ford and we've done a lot of winning. I always thought that when the F4 car was due for renewal someone would do something with the old car."

Oldfield said his intention would still to be involved in FF1600, especially for the headline events of the Festival and WHT. KMR team boss Kevin Mills also intends to still run cars in FF1600 but is keen to field a pair in GB4 next season

including one for his son, Tom.

"The plan is to run two cars," said Mills. "Depending on the budget, we'd like to give Tom a go. The package is brilliant, everything is being run really well, they are people who genuinely want you to be in the championship and really encouraging you to do it."

Others to have declared an interest in joining GB4 include existing GB3 teams Arden, Fortec, Elite Motorsport and Hillspeed, while current F4 squads JHR Developments and Richardson Racing, Porsche operation In2Racing and Ginetta outfit Hart GT are also set to be on the grid.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Ginetta ace de Haan makes F4 debut

ITALIAN F4

Ginetta Junior star Robert de Haan made an impressive Formula 4 debut last weekend in the final round of the Italian championship at Monza as he gears up for a single-seater switch in 2022.

The Dutch racer, who was fourth in the Ginetta points, joined compatriot team Van Amersfoort Racing at Monza. His best qualifying position was 12th from the 35-car field, and

he had a best race result of 13th.

The relationship was rekindled from 2020, when de Haan tested with VAR. "We knew he was fast from when he did some testing with us," said VAR F4 team boss Rob Niessink. "The boy did a terrific job at Monza. The family said, 'Let's go for top positions' and I said, 'Hang on, this is more or less a European F4 championship – it's not a walk in the park.' But he was really good in difficult circumstances – wet, damp and dry."

Although de Haan has won the FEED Racing scholarship, he could pass this up to race with VAR. "They still need to decide where to go but, in preparation for that, we agreed he could do Monza with us, and we've also agreed to do Nurburgring [this weekend's German F4 finale]," added Niessink. "It would be lovely if we could sign him for next season."

VAR will also field Marcos Flack at the Nurburgring: the Australian was 11th in British



F4 this year and also raced at Monza, scoring a best result of 19th with Cram Motorsport. The team's already crowned Italian champion Ollie Bearman won all three races.

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Magnussen reunited with his Festival-winning RF92 at Brands

FORMULA FORD FESTIVAL

Jan Magnussen was reunited with his 1992 Formula Ford Festival-winning Van Diemen RF92 at last weekend's 50th edition of the event.

The ex-Formula 1 driver was a late entry to this year's Festival after being persuaded to enter by his nephew, British GT champion Dennis Lind. At the wheel of a Low Dempsey Racing-run Ray GR14, Magnussen made it through to Sunday's final at Brands Hatch and was classified 11th after starting 24th.

The Dane found that his original car was also present and housed in the same

awning in the paddock. "That was a pleasant surprise," said Magnussen. "I knew it was around – Dario Franchitti [Magnussen's 1994 British F3 team-mate] sent me a photo of it six or seven years ago I think, just to let me know that it still existed somewhere.

"I've been sort of wondering where it was so when I arrived and saw that it was here by chance, fantastic. It brings back a lot of good memories."

The Van Diemen RF92 was being driven by Lewis Fox, who made it as far as the Last Chance race in the main event, and finished fifth in the Historic final.

STEFAN MACKLEY



IN THE HEADLINES

JUDGE RULES IN BMW 635

Former Caterham racer Tristan Judge enjoyed a good run in last Sunday's Motor Racing Legends Historic Touring Car Challenge contest at Silverstone, finishing a class-winning seventh on his historic racing debut in the glorious BMW 635 CSi raced in 1983 by Italian Giuseppe Briozzo and Swiss Georges Bossard.

JACKSON'S HAYES RF90 BID

Historic Formula Ford champion Cam Jackson will tackle this weekend's Walter Hayes Trophy in a Van Diemen RF90. He will contest both the main draw and the Janet Cesar Trophy for pre-1993 cars. The RF90 belongs to Dave Morgan and was first raced by Neil Cunningham in 1991. It was also the last car Cunningham raced before his death from motor neurone disease in 2016. "It's about the only era of Formula Ford I haven't raced," commented Jackson about the 1990 machine.

JOHN ROGERS PASSES AWAY

Sir John Rogers, a former executive chairman of the Royal Automobile Club Motor Sports Association, as the UK governing body was known at the time, has died aged 93. The Cold War fighter pilot enjoyed a distinguished military career and had a life-long interest in motorsport, holding the MSA post for 10 years from 1989 before being made a vice-president. He also sat on the FIA's World Motor Sport Council.

THANK YOU TO MARSHALS

Scottish Motor Racing Club sponsors supported a final race meeting thank you to the marshals at Knockhill last weekend. Cars had sunstrips or graphic panels (below) saying, 'Thank you 2021 Marshals'. A week earlier at Brands Hatch, Porsche Carrera Cup GB Pro-Am class winner Charles Rainford proudly displayed a British Motorsports Marshals Club sticker on his car.

Goodwin back to Festival in old RF89

FORMULA FORD FESTIVAL

GT stalwart Chris Goodwin competed at last weekend's Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch in the same Van Diemen RF89 he raced more than three decades ago.



Goodwin – a test driver with Aston Martin and previously McLaren, and who was Pro-Am class champion in the 2020 GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup – secured the 1989 Champion of Brands title with the chassis, and was in fine form again at the circuit.

He just missed out on a spot in the final, finishing seventh in the Last Chance race, but had already grabbed silverware when he claimed third place in the Historic final.

"I bought it [the car] a few years ago and Pete Alexander is someone I have known since the 1980s and got it going again," said Goodwin. "I did the Champion of Brands race back in the summer and we realised the engine that came with the car was probably a 1300cc Formula Ford engine, so we got a new engine built and we've been working out how to set it up for the wet and dry. We will be back next year 100%."

STEFAN MACKLEY

MOIR



Pryce maintains BRC lead with Cambrian win

RALLYING

The race to be crowned British Rally champion is going down to the final round, despite Osian Pryce extending his lead at the top of the standings by triumphing on the Cambrian Rally last weekend.

With Irishman Noel O'Sullivan on the notes, Pryce never put a wheel wrong across the event's seven special stages, the last of which switched from gravel to asphalt, to make it back-to-back BRC victories.

"We did our work in the morning of the rally and managed to build on that," said Volkswagen Polo driver Pryce. "I knew it wouldn't be easy and it wasn't, but we kept our noses clean and we stayed out of trouble to take the win. We came here knowing we had to win, we did what we had to do, so I am really pleased about that."

The only person who has a mathematical chance of denying him a maiden British



crown is reigning champion Matt Edwards. Even then, he requires Pryce to score poorly or retire on the Ulster Rally finale.

Edwards's involvement looked to be over on stage four of the Cambrian when he got caught out by the slippery forest roads and bent the front-right track control arm on his Polo. But over the remaining three stages he carried out running repairs to finish third in the BRC1 standings. "In this sport you just don't give up, do you?" Edwards said. "We strapped the wheel up so many different ways to make the car driveable. It had to work because we

needed to score points."

Former Porsche Carrera Cup GB racer Seb Perez was the other BRC1 podium finisher, second being his best result in his first full season as a BRC driver.

In Junior BRC, meanwhile, Ford Fiesta pilot William Creighton overcame early mechanical problems to record his third consecutive victory, taking his win count in 2021 to four. He now comfortably leads the way from Eamonn Kelly, who was forced to retire his Fiesta R2T on the fifth test with a driveshaft failure.

JASON CRAIG

Junior runner-up McNeilly to stay in series for 2022

GINETTA JUNIOR

Ginetta Junior runner-up Liam McNeilly will continue in the series for a third season in 2022, becoming just the fourth driver to have finished in the top two and remained in the category the following year.

The Fox Motorsport racer explained that the decision to stay in the series was due to his 16th birthday falling at the end of April, meaning he would miss the start of the season for a senior championship as well



as important preparation time.

"With my age, I would only be able to do F4 next season [as an alternative] and the

route I want to take is GTs – and we don't feel F4 is the most productive thing to do," he said.

Instead, McNeilly is targeting

success at next weekend's Winter Series ahead of the main 2022 season. "I will probably be everyone's favourite to take the title next year and that's the aim," he added.

McNeilly will be joined in Fox's line-up for the Brands Hatch winter event and next season by Jacob Hodgkiss, who took a best result of 14th with Race Car Consultants this year. The team still has one further space available for the Winter Series.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

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European event-winning Volvo to join British Rallycross field

BRITISH RALLYCROSS

A European Rallycross event-winning Volvo C30 will join the British Rallycross Championship 5 Nations Trophy from the next event at Lydden Hill this weekend.

Former Swift Sport category racer Dominic Flitney, who has made sporadic appearances with a self-built Subaru Impreza in the Supercar division, has acquired an ex-Frode Holte C30.

The car made its debut at the Swedish round of Euro RX in 2010, finishing on the podium. Holte continued to race the Volvo through 2011, claiming multiple podiums and winning the French round at Essay.

Following a failed attempt to run it full-time in American-based Global Rallycross in 2012, the C30 was campaigned in

Europe by Holte and Daniel Holten, and was later sold to the Circle X team.

"I had such a great time driving the Subaru," said Flitney. "However, to allow me to run nearer the front I needed more horsepower. The Volvo is so well known in rallycross circles, and has always been popular with the fans. It will be great to bring another new manufacturer onto the Supercar grids too — I don't like being the same as everyone else, I've always liked to be a little bit different. It will of course be very different to anything I've ever driven."

Meanwhile, former British RX podium finisher Jack Thorne will race a Peugeot 208 used earlier this year in 5 Nations BRX by Andy Scott as he returns to the discipline after spending time in rallying.

HAL RIDGE

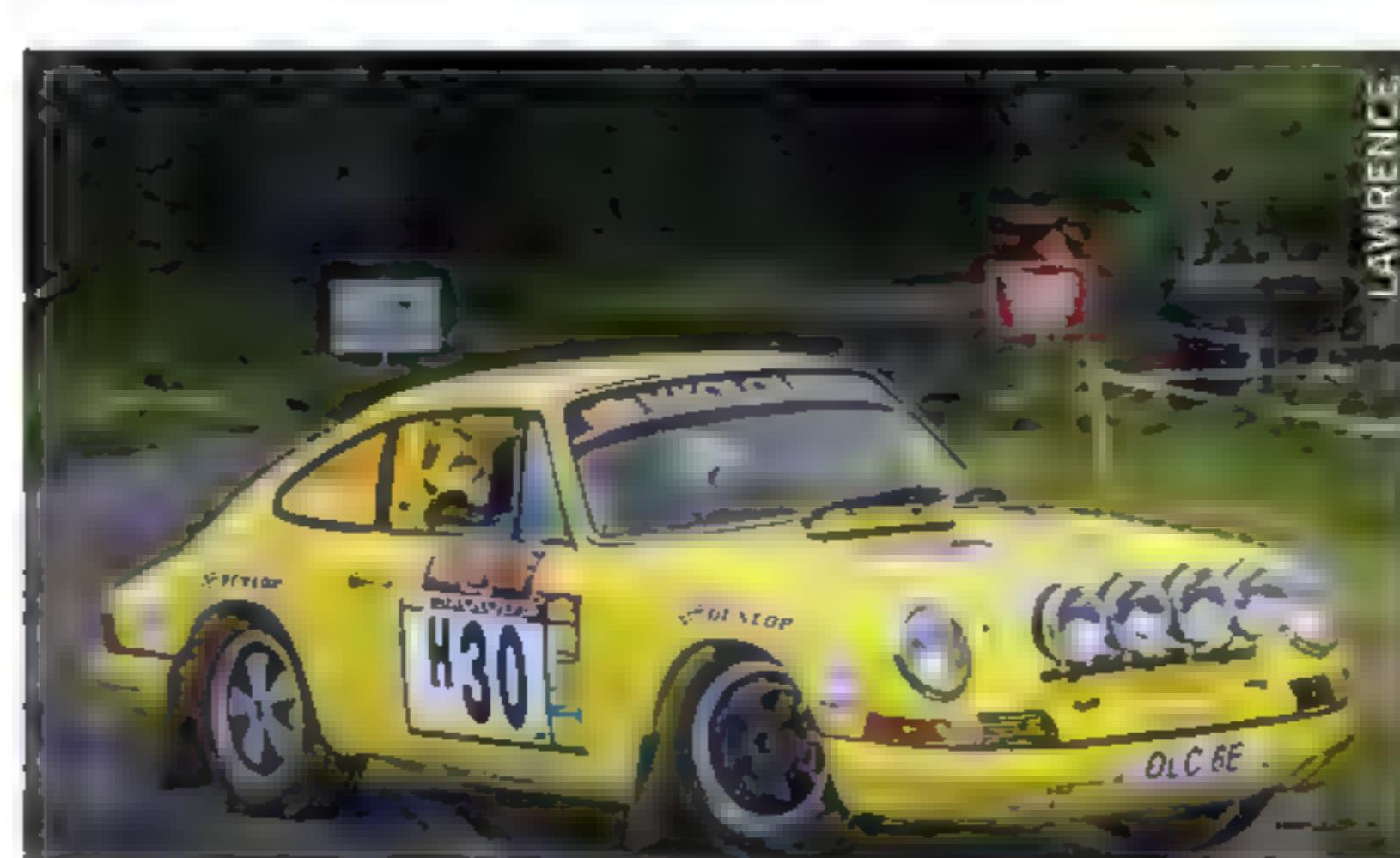
Dessie Nutt 1951-2021

OBITUARY

Dessie Nutt, one of the most popular characters in historic rallying, died last week at the age of 70 after an illness.

Nutt, a GP from Castlerock in Northern Ireland, was a very successful and experienced driver, best known for competing in his 1967 Category 1 Porsche 911, which served him well for 25 years and around 300 rallies.

He started rallying in Minis in the early 1970s and had his last rally in the spring of 2019 on his beloved Isle of Man. In the 911 he won the overall British Historic Rally



Championship in 2004 and 2009, partnered by Geraldine McBride.

As well as being a great competitor, Dessie was a true gentleman, a fine raconteur and a good friend to many in the sport. He was part of Team Tuthill for the Safari Classic Rally with a role of team doctor and head of entertainment. He was also a devoted family man.

PAUL LAWRENCE

STUDENT-RUN SEBRING SPRITE MAKES ITS DEBUT

HRDC ALLSTARS

The Oxford Universities Motorsport Foundation student-run 1960 Austin-Healey Sebring Sprite evocation took an impressive fifth in class on its debut in last weekend's Historic Racing Drivers Club Allstars race at Silverstone.

The car (below) has been five years in the making and is built round a shell donated by John Yea, outgoing director of British Motor Heritage, with body panels provided by Steve Hall of Hall's Garage and mechanical components gifted from across the industry. But the Sebring Sprite's participation was jeopardised by a major problem three days beforehand.

"Nick Swift [of Swiftune] is an absolute hero," said Ding Boston, who founded OUMF in 2005. "He had students living with him while they built the engine but, while we were running it up on axle stands in preparation for Silverstone, the oil pressure dropped. We scurried around and an old friend David Savage loaned us his 1380cc engine.

"The students — of which more than 200 have been involved since its inception — put the engine in and, after a couple of all-nighters and burning all the midnight oil we could find, we took the Sprite to Turweston Airfield on Friday to check that everything worked."

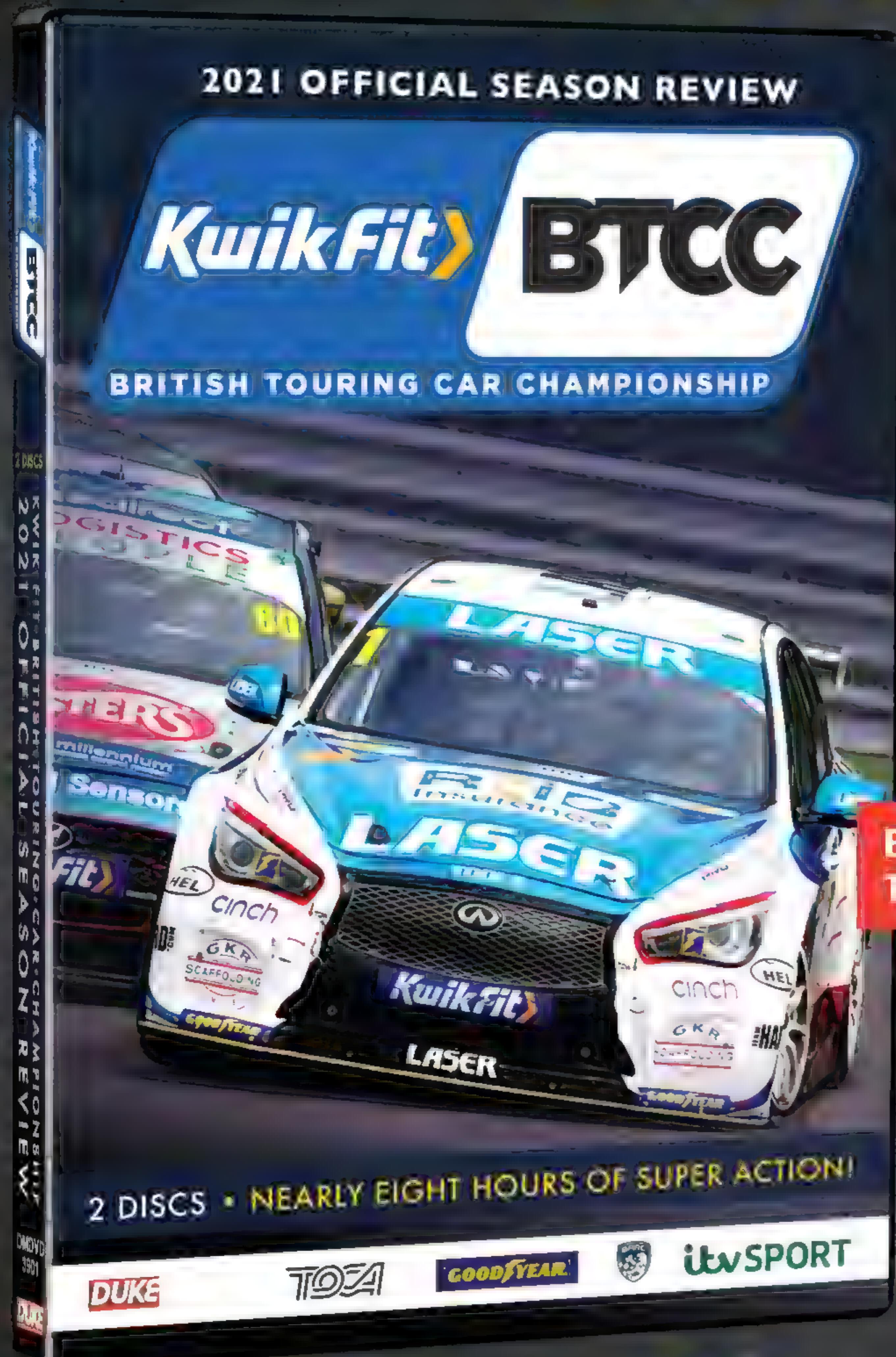
Boston survived a grim qualifying session curtailed by torrential rain and a howling gale. He progressed from 33rd to 28th in the race. "As always, I'm very proud of the students, their determination and what they have achieved," Boston added.

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A Festival to remember

Big names were back on track and in the grandstand for the 50th Formula Ford Festival, a reminder of the enduring appeal of the knockout contest

STEFAN MACKLEY

You can't have so many people so close on lap time and something not happen. There's going to be drama." Two-time Walter Hayes Trophy winner Michael Moyers's prediction prior to the Formula Ford Festival final certainly proved accurate last weekend at Brands Hatch.

Three major contenders wiped out in a substantial collision, Jamie Sharp putting in a faultless drive to win from sixth on the grid, and 10 cars covered by less than 2.5 seconds at the chequered flag all featured in the 50th edition of the Festival, which was one of the most tightly contested and thrilling in years. There was a general buzz in the outer paddock for the whole weekend, despite at times near-biblical weather, with just shy of 100 entrants intent on making the most of the special 'anniversary' and no fewer than 15 drivers in with a realistic shot of outright glory.

The profile of the event had been raised further in the days leading up to it by news that former Formula 1 racers and Festival winners Roberto Moreno and Jan Magnussen would be making a return, taking the fever level up a notch. And the ex-F1 racers weren't just in the cars. Watching Sunday's action from the grandstand were Eddie Irvine, Ralph Firman Jr and Bruno Giacomelli, with six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon also in attendance. And for those who couldn't be there – such as Stefan Johansson, who was preparing for the Royal Automobile

While the event may no longer be a must-go destination for future F1 drivers, that's certainly not to say those in the cockpit today lack ability. Far from it, with a driver required to constantly be on top of the machine at all times, according to 1992 Festival winner Magnussen.

"I love the challenge," he says. "There's so much enjoyment driving this car because you are out of shape the whole time. In the braking zone you get crossed up, you try to gather it back up again and get back on the power, you get crossed up again, you bounce over a kerb. It just feels like you're trying to save yourself the whole time."

Wet track conditions that plagued most of the weekend only served to showcase the skills of those behind the wheel to an even greater degree and the raw ability of those racing at the top of the category. It perhaps wasn't surprising that Joey Foster and Niall Murray occupied the front row of the grid for the final, with their vast wealth of Formula Ford experience seeing them through the heats and semi-finals in emphatic style. But a crash for Murray and off-track excursion for Foster in the final only served to show how close to the edge these drivers operate.

Yet it was two young drivers who were perhaps the most impressive over the weekend in the forms of Team USA Scholarship winner Max Esterson and Tom Mills, son of three-time Castle Combe champion and team boss Kevin.

Esterson was making his return to the Festival after finishing sixth last year and third overall in the National Formula Ford standings this term. His charge from 13th to third – via a breathtaking pass on Chris Middlehurst into Paddock Hill Bend with one wheel briefly on the grass – before being promoted to second post-race was well deserved.

Mills Jr, who only started car racing in May, was cruelly denied the chance to become the youngest-ever Festival winner when he was the helpless victim in Murray and Ollie White's collision.

But the skills the pair have learned in Formula Ford so far have put them in good stead for next season. Esterson has already been testing GB3 machinery ahead of a move into the championship, while Mills may get the chance to race in GB4 as Kevin Mills Racing looks set to make the step up. This writer has no doubt that both will take well to slicks and wings, having learned about car control through their apprenticeships in Formula Ford.

The Festival will almost certainly never regain the same prestige it once held when the likes of Moreno and Magnussen were originally competing, but last weekend once again showed that it retains the charm, appeal and competitiveness that still grabs the attention of those who reached the pinnacle of the sport. ■

"There's so much enjoyment driving this car because you're out of shape the whole time"

Club art exhibition (see listings, p78) – there was the British Racing & Sports Car Club livestream, which the Swede admitted he was keeping an eye on.

It all served as a reminder of how important the Festival has been in the careers of many grand prix drivers and why they still hold it in such regard. "For me it was very special because that led to me having a three-year Lotus F1 test contract," says Moreno of his 1980 Festival success. "Peter Collins was watching the Festival and he convinced Colin Chapman [Lotus founder] to sign me up. By doing that, I was able to come back to Europe and continue my racing career. I think it [Festival victory] gave me a direction towards Formula 1. It allowed me to stay in Europe, otherwise I wouldn't have the money to come back here again."

 P66 FESTIVAL REPORT



**BRANDS HATCH
BRSCC FORMULA FORD FESTIVAL
30-31 OCTOBER**

The 50th edition of the Formula Ford Festival was always going to produce plenty of thrills and spills and, in the end, an unlikely winner emerged when Jamie Sharp took the coveted victory.

The landmark 50th had attracted back former winners Roberto Moreno, Jan Magnussen and Dennis Lind, helping to create a buzz not felt at the event in years as nearly 100 cars battled for outright success. But it was two other former winners in the shape of Joey Foster (Don Hardman Racing Firman 2021) and Niall Murray (Team Dolan Van Diemen BD21) who lined up on the front row for the final. Both had taken

comprehensive wins in their respective heats and semi-finals, and were each intent on being the first to take a hat-trick of overall wins at the fabled event.

Foster just held the lead on the opening lap of a dry final, with Murray attempting a pass on the inside at Surtees before hanging on around the outside at Clearways, which allowed 2020 Walter Hayes Trophy winner Ollie White (Medina Sport JL17) the opportunity to move into second. It was soon White's turn to defend though, with Murray looking on the inside at Clearways on lap three before the race was turned on its head on the next tour.

Murray dived to the inside on Hailwood's Hill and, when White came across, the pair banged wheels and were sent spinning, the Irishman into the path of Tom Mills's

Spectrum KMR, who was a helpless victim as all three were eliminated.

The safety car was deployed with Foster now leading from Sharp, who had started sixth in his Medina Sport JL17 and had got past Neil MacLennan on lap two when the Spectrum KMR driver ran slightly wide exiting Graham Hill Bend. MacLennan's Kevin Mills Racing team-mate Michael Moyers ran fourth from Ivor McCullough and Team USA Scholarship driver Max Esterson, who was making impressive progress from 13th on the grid at the wheel of his Low Dempsey Racing-run Ray GR18.

Foster led at the restart, but made a rare mistake at Clearways at the midway point of the 20-lap race when he caught one of the few damp patches remaining from the morning deluge. The sideways moment sent him off, with Moyers also taking a trip through the gravel after Esterson dived to the inside of the two-time WHT winner.

Sharp now found himself leading but soon had the attentions of MacLennan to worry about. The Scot made his move into Druids on lap 13 and, while the pass was successful, it was completed under waved yellows. MacLennan had no intention of conceding the position, which would prove costly, and strongly defended his lead around the Indy circuit.

Sharp bided his time, and eventually made the decisive move exiting Graham Hill Bend, drawing alongside the Spectrum on





the approach to Surtees before completing the pass with three laps to run. Despite leading a convoy of 10 cars, Sharp – a former British Formula 4 driver – sustained the pressure to claim an unlikely win and only his second-ever car racing victory.

"I was just going out to have fun [having started sixth]," said Sharp, who secured B-M Racing's second Festival win in a row. "We always had in the back of our minds we were there to win it and, when Niall ended up in third, I thought it's anybody's race. The crash happened, I was in second and then Joey went off. After I got past Neil again, that was it, all guns blazing just trying to keep it from going off and keep in front."

B-M Racing team boss Andy Brickles added: "It's the best I have ever seen him drive. He didn't put a foot wrong, he learnt his lesson from the heats."

Sharp's heat had indeed been fraught with peril, despite being comfortably the quickest driver on a wet track. The Medina is famed for being good in slippery conditions, but on two occasions he threw away the lead. The first came at Graham Hill Bend, which dropped him to third behind 2021 National FF1600 champion Chris Middlehurst and 2019 Festival winner Jonathan Browne. But Sharp was back into the lead at the start of the next lap, deposing Middlehurst at Paddock Hill Bend and lapping more than 1s quicker than his rivals at times.

Again it didn't last, as he went off into >>

MORENO'S MISFORTUNE AS RIVETT WINS HISTORICS



Roberto Moreno's highly anticipated return to the Festival, aboard the same specification of Van Diemen RF80 with which he won the event in 1980, was sadly one of misfortune.

The one-time Formula 1 podium finisher was on course to qualify for the semi-finals from his heat aboard the Van Diemen, which was in the same livery he used at the Festival 41 years ago, when he was hit from behind by Lewis Fox at Druids, with Fox later being disqualified.

"Somebody bumped me in the back and left his nosecone in my gearbox," said Moreno, who rejoined but wasn't classified since the race was red-flagged for the incident. "He punted me so hard that I spun. That was a mistake he made, he came and apologised. It just happens."

Moreno's fortunes didn't improve in the second Progression race, despite an impressive start where he climbed to the fringes of the top 10 from 20th on the grid. Forced into avoiding action when cars tangled ahead of him at Surtees, his off-road moment and recovery meant he finished ninth and missed out on a spot for the semi-finals.

His attention turned to Sunday's historic final, but Moreno made it no

further than Paddock Hill Bend on the opening lap when he spun on the damp track and became one of many to get stuck in the gravel.

This didn't detract from a thrilling race, with Alan Davidson (Mondiale) leading at the end of the caution period after getting the jump on poleman Darwin Smith off the line. But the man on the move was Matt Rivett, the 2006 Castle Combe FF1600 champion diving past Brandon McCaughan for third at Paddock, only to lose the position into Druids.

Rivett made the move stick on the next lap, this time around the outside at Paddock. By now this was for second, since moments earlier race leader Davidson had gone off into the Clearways gravel. It wasn't to be his last off-track excursion – he did the same again on the next lap!

Rivett's charge to catch Smith was helped when another safety car was deployed to retrieve Dan Rene Larsen's Van Diemen RF95 from the Paddock gravel and, at the restart, Rivett took less than a lap to move into the lead via a pass into Surtees.

From there, the Van Diemen RF91 driver never looked back. Rivett took victory by nearly three seconds and became the inaugural winner of the Brian Jones Memorial Trophy, named in honour of the legendary Brands Hatch commentator who passed away earlier this year, and whose daughter and grand-daughter were on hand to present the award.

Smith missed out on a potential podium with a loss of power for his Van Diemen RF90 in the final laps, with McCaughan (Mondiale M89S) and Chris Goodwin at the wheel of his 1989 Champion of Brands-winning Van Diemen RF89 (see news) completing the podium.

STEFAN MACKLEY



the Clearways gravel lapping backmarkers and dropped to third again before eventually finishing on the tail of Browne, who had taken the lead from Middlehurst.

Sharp's route through his semi-final proved to be less dramatic, and he followed Murray and Maclennan home. But there was drama behind for his B-M Racing team-mate, last year's Festival winner Rory Smith, who went off into the gravel at Paddock and got beached, throwing away any chance of repeating his triumph from 12 months ago and missing out on the final altogether (see below).

Maclennan's second place in the semi-final came after briefly leading following a deluge of rain before the start, but he eventually followed Murray home in a repeat of heat four's result held in the dry on Saturday. While the Scot finished second on the road in the final, he was disqualified for his overtaking move under yellows, promoting Esterson to the runner-up spot after an impressive weekend.

The American was in good company in the heats, as the only victor not to have already won a Festival. From pole he put in an assured drive in wet conditions, keeping White behind for the duration of heat three. Esterson's pace deserted him in the semi-final – he elected to save his new set of tyres for the final, and from first he dropped to seventh by the chequered flag.



B-M Racing squad took second Festival win in a row thanks to Sharp

MacLennan's disqualification also promoted Esterson's Team USA Scholarship partner Andre Castro to third. He had gone under the radar almost all weekend, taking third from Middlehurst in the opening heat on the final lap and fourth in the first semi.

Behind Castro came 2019 WHT winner Jordan Dempsey, Middlehurst and McCullough, while Foster rued his mistake in seventh. Another driver left to wonder what might have been was 16-year-old Mills. The son of team boss and three-time Castle Combe FF1600 champion Kevin Mills took an impressive pole for the second heat, ahead of 2010 Festival winner Lind. A shot of victory for Mills disappeared when a late decision to bring in the safety car

caught him out, with the following Matt Cowley running into the back of him and bending a lower wishbone after Mills slowed to try to build a gap to the pitting pace car.

Mills slipped to fourth but charged through to third in the second semi-final, behind Foster again and White, and was in contention for outright glory before being collected in the Murray/White incident.

Both Lind and Magnussen made it through to the final on their returns after scrapping it out in their heats (eighth and fifth) and semi-finals (eighth and 12th). Lind was classified ninth overall while his uncle, 1992 Festival winner Magnussen, took 11th after climbing from 24th on the grid.

STEFAN MACKLEY

COOPER MAKES IT TO THE FINAL AS SMITH MISSES OUT

One notable omission from the Festival final line-up was last year's victor Rory Smith, who failed to make it through the Last Chance race after his earlier off in the semi-final.

"I couldn't see anything [due to the spray] and I was on a much narrower line than I had been all weekend," said Smith of his mistake at Paddock Hill Bend. "The back end went, I corrected it and went into the gravel."

Smith only made it onto the

back of the Last Chance grid via the reserve list, starting 29th out of the 30 runners with only the top six progressing via the eight-lap dash. The odds were always stacked against him, and any chance of making it through disappeared when the race turned into a procession as two safety cars were called to retrieve stricken cars at Paddock.

The first incident involved poleman Benjamin Cochran who, after bogging down at the

start, spun and was joined in the gravel by Tom Hawkins. At the restart, it was Chris Acton's turn to bring out the safety car, with the final lap completed at racing speed, by which time Smith had pulled into the pits.

Luke Cooper took the victory after starting alongside Cochran on the front row. The two-time Castle Combe FF1600 champion had a difficult weekend, spinning in his heat after contact with Jamie Sharp through Surtees before just making it through to the semi-final in 12th. The Swift SC20 driver could only finish 13th in the semi-final, which is where he would eventually finish in the final courtesy of his Last Chance win, where he beat Darwin Smith and Derek Palmer.

Michael Gray (Ray GR10) took victory in the first Progression race on Saturday in the dry after

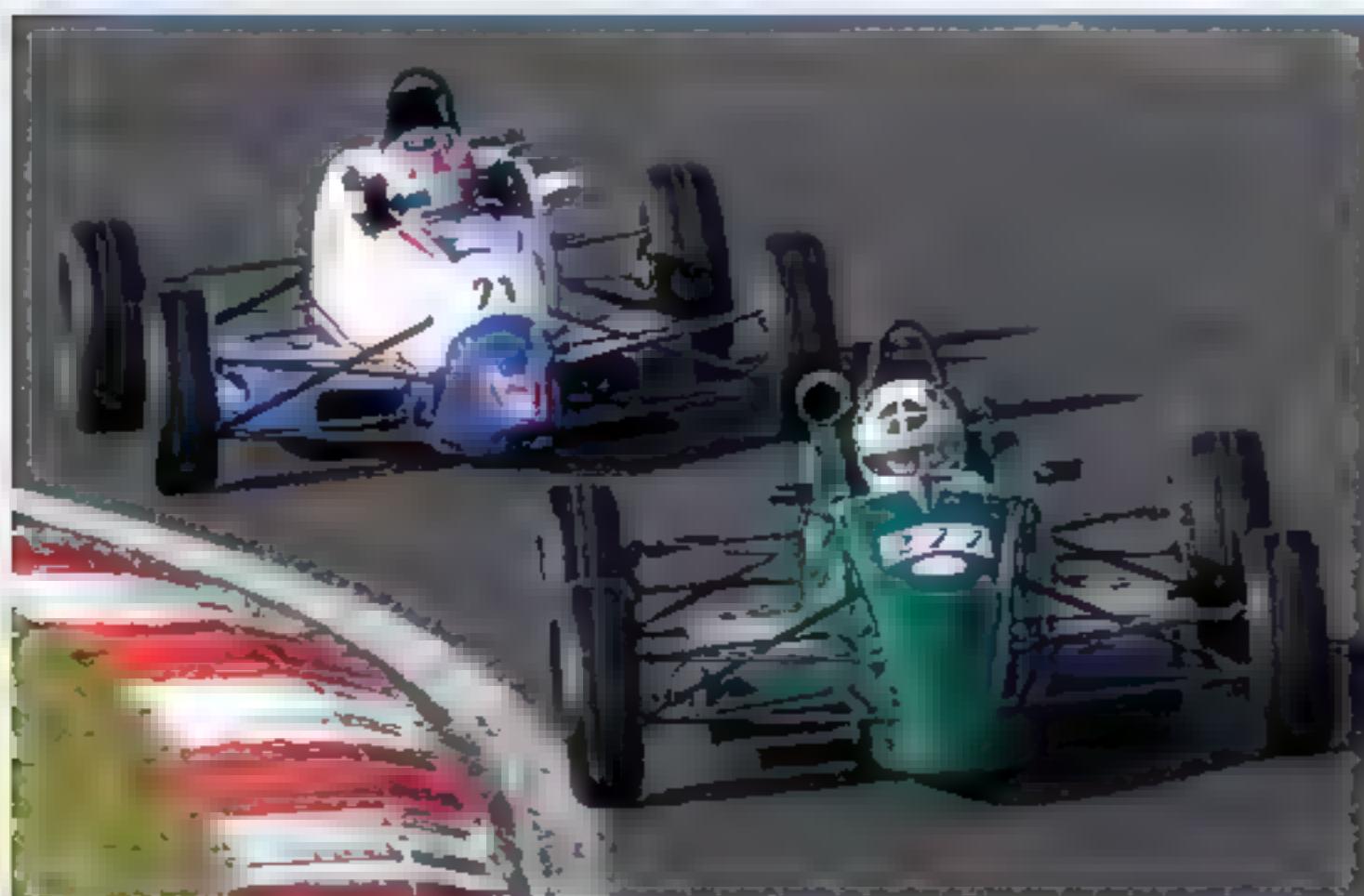


starting last, passing Chris Hodgen (Van Diemen RF89) for the lead on the last lap at Druids.

In the second Progression race, Jack Kemp (Ray GR07) led throughout and headed home Adam Fathers and James Hagan, while Lewis Fox scraped through in sixth aboard Jan Magnussen's 1992 Festival-winning Van Diemen RF92 after being disqualified from his heat for contact with Roberto Moreno.

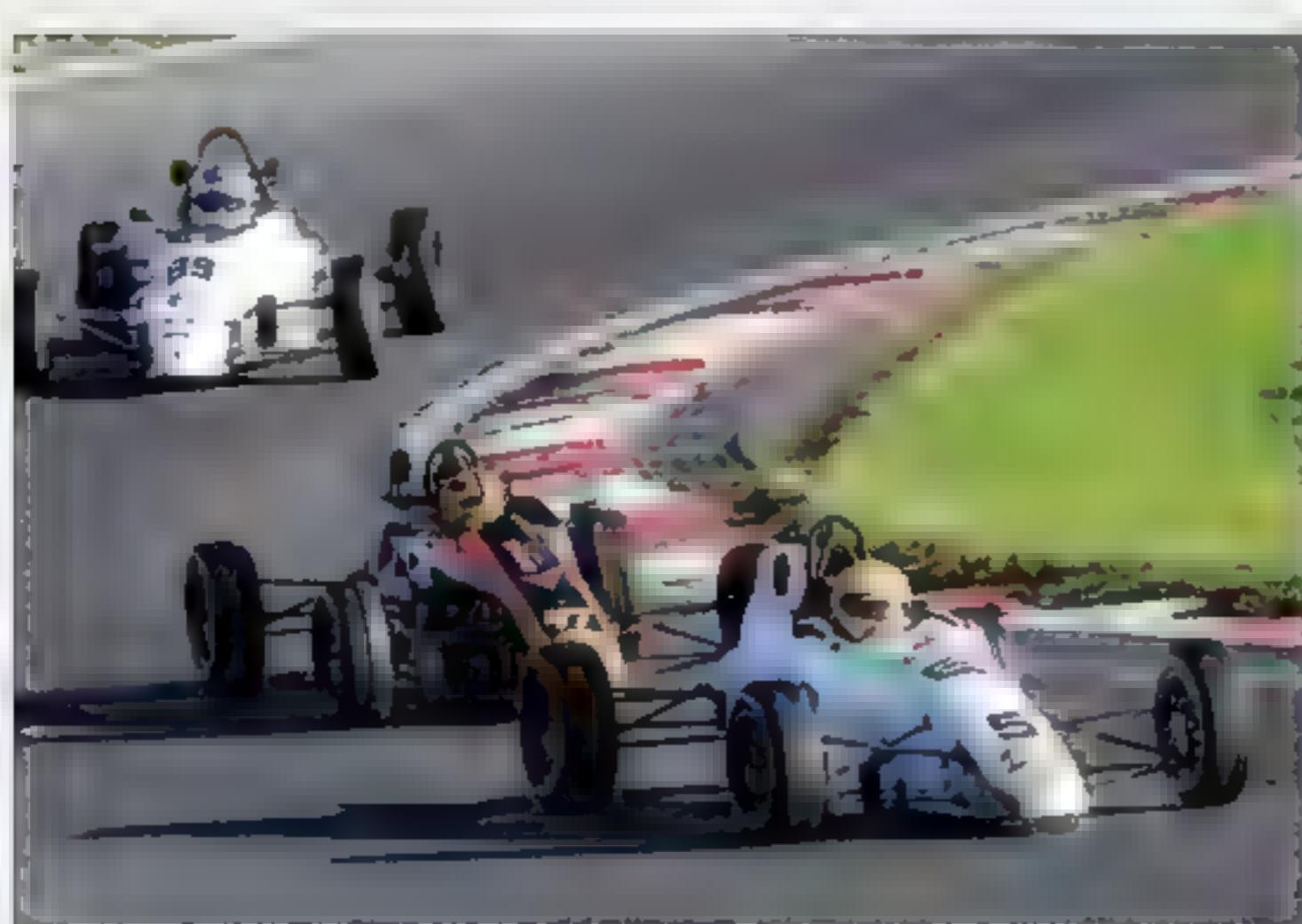
STEFAN MACKLEY



BRANDS HATCH
WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA FORD FESTIVAL

Heat 1 Jonathan Browne (Ray GR18)
Heat 2 Joey Foster (Firman 2021, above)
Heat 3 Max Esterson (Ray GR18)
Heat 4 Niall Murray (Van Diemen BD21)
Progression race 1 Michael Gray (Ray GR10)
Progression race 2 Jack Kemp (Ray GR07)
Semi-final 1 Niall Murray (Van Diemen BD21)
Semi-final 2 Joey Foster (Firman 2021)
Last Chance race Luke Cooper (Swift SC20)
Historic final Matt Rivett (Van Diemen RF91, below)
Final (20 laps) 1 **Jamie Sharp (Medina Sport**
JL17); 2 Max Esterson (Ray GR18) +0.138s; 3 Andre Castro (Ray GR15); 4 Jordan Dempsey (Van Diemen RF00); 5 Chris Middlehurst (Van Diemen LA10); 6 Ivor McCullough (Van Diemen RF00).
Fastest lap Middlehurst 50.787s (85.62mph).
Pole Joey Foster (Firman 2021). **Starters** 30.



MX-5 SUPERCUP

Races 1 & 3 Jack Harding
Race 2 Declan Lee

MX-5 CHAMPIONSHIP

Race 1 Brian Trott
Race 2 Steve Foden
Race 3 Michael Knibbs

MX-5 CLUBMAN

Races 1 & 2 Chris Dawkins

AMOC GT/INTERMARQUE

Race 1 Rikki Cann (Aston Martin V8 Vantage, below)
Race 2 Rob Fenn (Lotus Elise)



For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

THREE MAZDA TITLES DECIDED ON FINAL WEEKEND

Eight races for three Mazda MX-5 championships, all of them still to be decided, provided a fitting support programme for the cut-and-thrust excitement of the Formula Ford Festival.

Reigning Supercup champion Samuel Smith took a 14-point lead to Brands Hatch but, with a maximum of 300 points at stake over three races, there was plenty of scope for things to change.

Smith was always in contention for race one victory, but Jack Harding overtook before the first safety car intervention. James Cossins also passed Smith before a second caution period, which resulted in the safety car leading the field to an early chequered flag.

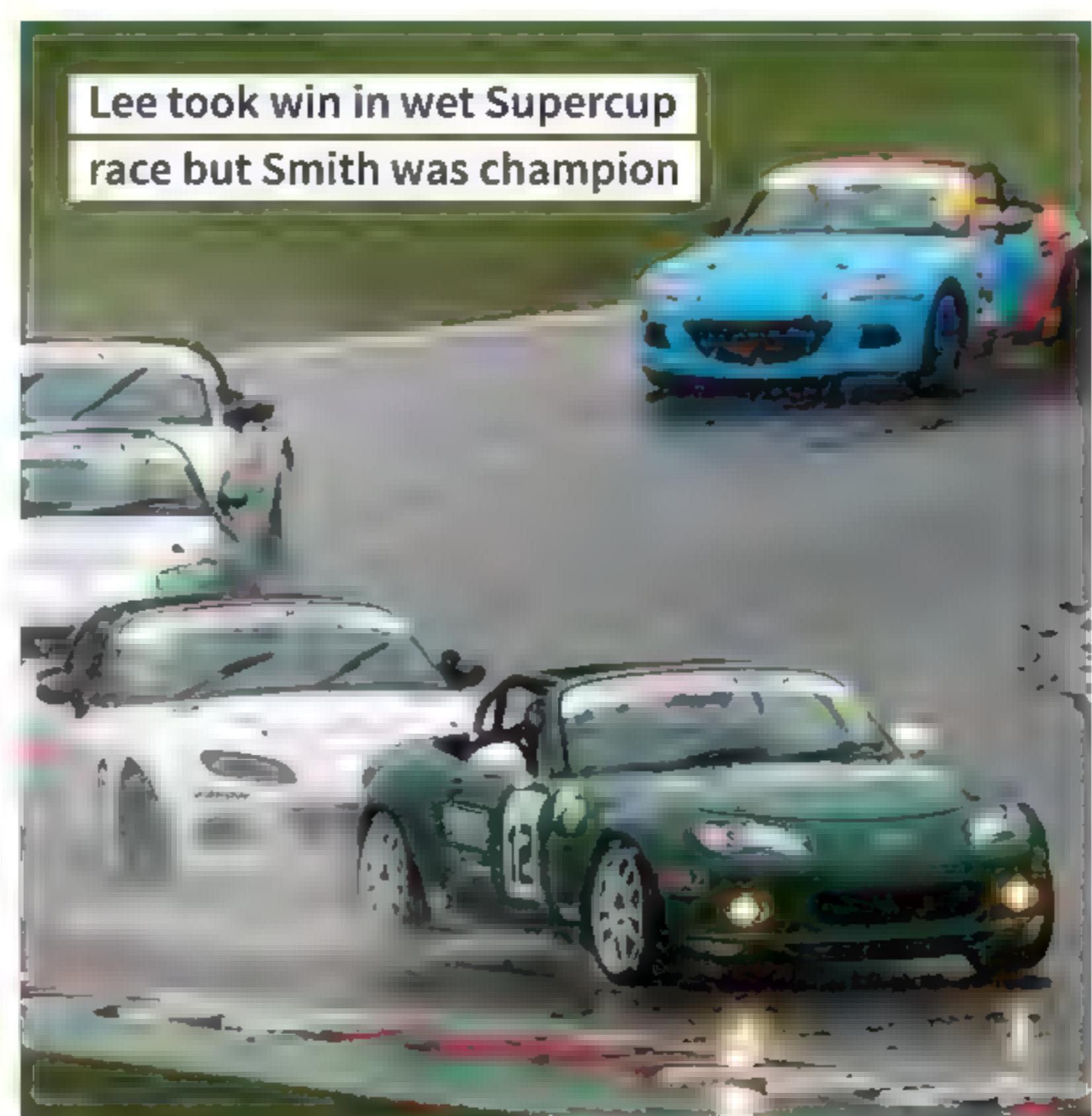
Race two, in dreadful Sunday morning conditions, was reduced to three racing laps after a shunt within seconds of the start and a lengthy caution. Smith slipped back after a four-abreast attempt at the first corner, but finished fourth, a couple of places ahead of Harding, to increase his advantage. Declan Lee scored his first win.

The decider was also shortened after three cars became beached at Paddock. If Harding won, Smith needed to be in the top seven to become champion. Harding did win, but Smith was safe – if not exactly comfortable – in fourth place to retain his title.

Things were just as tight in what might be called the original MX-5 Championship for Mk1 machines. Jack Brewer's eight-point advantage became a 20-point deficit after Oliver Allwood set fastest lap and finished second to Brian Trott in their first race. Brewer was sixth on the road, but a penalty for knocking Fraser Fenwick into a spin at Graham Hill Bend dropped him to 14th.

Allwood finished a close second in a damp race two, increasing his lead to 33 points. The winner was Steve Foden, who set pole in a wet qualifying and shone again in greasy conditions. Brewer spent much of the race battling with Fenwick before breaking clear to finish ninth with a late fastest lap.

A storming drive took Brewer up to second in race three, with a strong chance that he'd have won except that the chequered flag appeared



early with a car off track. It wasn't enough to stop Allwood taking a provisional title – he finished fourth, and only needed a place in the top 15 even if Brewer won the race. Michael Knibbs was a first-time winner.

One of the three Mazda titles was decided on the first day, and it went to Harry Storer in the Clubman class by finishing sixth and seventh in a pair of races. One of these took place on a wet track and the other in dry conditions. The first result meant Storer only had to finish next time around, and he did this by staying out of trouble.

Chris Dawkins was a double race winner. His advantage over David Waters and Brad Jones was comfortable in the wet opening race, but Dawkins, Jones and Alan Hawkins were covered by half a second in the dry. Robert Greensmith, the only driver who could have snatched the title from Storer, finished behind the new champion in both races.

A pathetic Aston Martin Owners Club GT/Intermarque entry of five cars did nothing to justify the 50 minutes of race time allocated to it. Rikki Cann (Vantage V8) dominated race one before Rob Fenn took over the Lotus Elise he shared with Paul Whight and lapped just two other survivors in the second on his way to victory.

BRIAN PHILLIPS



Allwood took title after
overcoming points gap
to Brewer at Brands

Lister-Jaguar is antidote to Cobra venom

SILVERSTONE
MRL/MSVR
30-31 OCTOBER

Lister-Jaguars rarely featured in period endurance races, but James Cottingham and Max Girardo reversed that trend on Sunday, outrunning three rampant Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe evocations in the three-hour Royal Automobile Club Pall Mall Cup event, climax of a tremendous livestreamed Motor Racing Legends weekend on Silverstone's Historic Grand Prix circuit. The trophy is awarded to teams, however, and Hot Shots – Roy Alderslade/Andrew Jordan (Daytona Coupe), Chris Fox/Nick Pink (Lotus Elan) and Karsten Le Blanc/Christiaen van Lanschot (Austin-Healey 3000 DD300) – outpointed nine rivals.

With damp patches off-line, legacy of a deluge – and mini-tornado – that delayed qualifying, Cottingham forged Girardo's Costin-bodied car ahead at the start. He spun exiting Luffield, though, under pressure from British Touring Car star Rory Butcher in William Paul's Jaguar E-type and the 43-car pack, led by Irishman Michael Cullen's Daytona Coupe and Harvey Stanley in DK Engineering's Huffaker E-type. "I ran out of lock, reversed off the grass and did a three-point turn," said Cottingham, who came round 19th.

Butcher then pulled off the Hangar Straight on lap four, triggering a short safety car period. The car was repatriated to the pits, where a broken halfshaft was replaced. Stanley thus led, but Cottingham soon powered back ahead, pursued by



Cottingham and Girardo claimed Pall Mall Cup gold in Lister-Jag

Gareth Burnett, charging in Michael Birch's ex-works/Graham Hill Lotus 15. Miles Griffiths, flying in an Elan, was harassing Burnett when he careered deep into the gravel at Club on lap 14.

Ben Gill thundered his Cobra into fourth before George Pochciol (Daytona Coupe) and Nick Sleep (Cobra) growled past. Burnett relayed Birch and Cottingham installed Girardo a lap apart, with Jordan already middle-stinting for Alderslade. Girardo equalled his partner's spin tally with a rotation at Stowe before setting into an ultra-consistent rhythm ahead of Birch, who ceded to Richard Bradley after five laps.

Jordan halved his minute deficit to Girardo before Alderslade resumed, with Rob Hall third in French-Lebanese Greg Audi's Cobra and Jeremy Cottingham fourth in the DK Jag. All eyes were on Bradley, catching the quickest Cobras,

with a realistic prospect of a late pop at the Lister. Alas Bradley was squeezed over the kerbs at Becketts during lappery and the Lotus fell to rear suspension failure.

The closing stages were gripping as Sam Tordoff (who succeeded Paddy Shovlin in Cullen's car) and Olly Bryant (who was in for Matt Wrigley in Pochciol's) reeled Alderslade in. When Girardo put James Cottingham back into the Lister, new tyres were fitted during the mandatory five-minute stop and the Daytona Coupe trio negated their two-lap stagger. Bryant and Tordoff – who set fastest lap – ousted Alderslade, but Cottingham was 47 seconds ahead of Olly at the chequer.

Alderslade also went the distance, a lap clear of Audi and Joel Wykeham (who took over Sleep's Cobra from Alex Montgomery), with class winners Stanley and Marcus Weller, anchoring Will and



Colburn battles with a sliding Merrell in HRDC Classic Alfa/Allstars contest

WEEKEND WINNERS

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB PALL MALL CUP

James Cottingham/Max Girardo
(Lister-Jaguar Costin)

MRL JAGUAR CLASSIC CHALLENGE

Gary Pearson (E-type)

MRL RAC WOODCOTE TROPHY/
STIRLING MOSS TROPHY

Rob Smith/Chris Ward (Lister-Jaguar Knobbly)

MRL HISTORIC TOURING CAR CHALLENGE

Paul Mensley (Ford Sierra Cosworth RS500)

HRDC JACK SEARS TROPHY

Mark Burton/Jason Minshaw (Ford Mustang)

HRDC ALLSTARS/CLASSIC ALFA

James Colburn (Alfa Romeo Giulia Sprint GT)

MRL AMON CUP FORD GT40

Miles Griffiths/Gordon Shedden

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com



UNUSUAL PORSCHE The Scuderia Filipinetti Porsche 904 GTS of restaurateur Rainer Becker and marque preparation specialist Andy Prill turned heads in the Pall Mall Cup race. Chassis 079 boasts a wonderful period history. Sixth in the 1964 Nurburgring 1000Km, driven by Swiss pair Herbert Muller/Andre Knorr, it went on to place 11th in the 1964 Le Mans 24 Hours crewed by Muller/Claude Sage. Subsequently a road rally car, it won the 1965 Rallye de la Baule and 1966 Rallye de Lorraine.



GROWLING GT40s The second Amon Trophy GT40 race featured only seven cars, the Spa Six Hours and Estoril Classics events taking their mechanical toll. Nonetheless, a full-blooded battle between Miles Griffiths/Gordon Shedden in Philip Walker's example (above left) and Spa victors James Cottingham/Olly Bryant – this time sharing the former's – entertained onlookers, not least Brian Magee's posse of replica owners at Abbey. It was defused only when Bryant stopped for an oil top-up.



FRANCHITTI'S LATEST OUTING IndyCar legend Dario Franchitti, 48, is loving his historic racing, and the three-time Indy 500 winner jumped at the opportunity of joining brother Marino in fellow Scot Gregor Fisken's Jaguar E-type roadster in the Pall Mall Cup. Dario started and brought the Pre-'63 spec car up strongly into the top 10 overall before handing it to Fisken. Marino was on board when a rear hub failed. "It was a delight to have Dario along, but I'm sorry Marino didn't get a full run," said Fisken.

Michael Schryver's Elan Shapcraft coupe, seventh and eighth.

Saturday's Jaguar Classic Challenge was soloist Gary Pearson's domain, but Richard Kent (ex-Dick Protheroe CUT 7 FHC) snatched the lead briefly, then partner Chris Ward pushed Pearson all the way. Mark Donnor/Andrew Smith completed a Pearson's Engineering 1-2-3.

Diff failure stopped Stirling Moss Trophy race leader Pearson's Lister-Jag, whereupon Bradley went ahead in Birch's Lotus. Ward (in Steve Osborne's Lister, started by Rob Smith) was homing in relentlessly when fuel pick-up issues halted Bradley on the last lap. Second and third were Mark Cole (Lotus 11) and Mike Grant Peterkin/Pat Blakeney-Edwards (Cooper-Jaguar T38), the RAC Woodcote Trophy winners.

Sunday's Historic Touring Car Challenge was won stylishly on a drying track by Paul Mensley in his Murray Carter Netcomm tribute Ford Sierra RS500 after the Nissan Skylines of Simon Garrad and Ric Wood/Freddie Hunt broke. Top qualifier Hunt, son of 1977 British GP winner James, was shaping up to rob Mensley when fuel pressure issues spoiled his dream.

Richard Dutton (Lotus Cortina) headed the Historic Racing Drivers Club Jack Sears Trophy Pre-'66 saloon set until Jason Minshaw trumped him in Mark Burton's Ford Mustang. Cortinas were second and third, Neil Brown beating Irishman David Dickinson. Alfista James Colburn jostled through a cracking Dunlop Allstars/Classic Alfa Challenge lead quintet, shading Richard Merrell (two-litre GT Junior) and polesitter brother Ben Colburn (Mini Cooper S).

MARCUS PYE

Focus Cup
debutant Osborne
impressed by taking
a hat-trick of
victories



Junior graduate Osborne top of Focus Cup class

DONINGTON PARK
MSVR
30 OCTOBER

Ginetta Junior graduate Jamie Osborne made it three wins out of three on his debut in the Focus Cup at Donington Park.

From pole, Osborne instantly got to grips with the turbodiesel machinery and made his decisive escape on the opening lap of a wet first race, with Simon Walton heading the initial pursuit from Lewis Ryan. After ousting Ryan on lap three, Simon Rudd reeled in Walton, and took second into the chicane three laps later. But Osborne was a long way up the road, taking the win by over

12 seconds from Rudd, who secured the title. Walton kept Ryan at bay for third.

Ian Mitchell led the opening lap of race two before running wide, and Ryan and Osborne therefore headed a four-car break. Osborne soon got the jump at the Old Hairpin over his rivals, while Ryan, Walton and Rudd slotted in behind.

As Osborne's lead became unassailable again, second became a four-car battle, with Scott Parkin latching on. Into the chicane for the fifth time, Parkin emerged in third and immediately closed in on Ryan. Within a lap, Parkin was clear in second, taking the flag 4.7s down on the dominant Osborne. Rudd just held onto third from

Ryan as the rain returned.

With Osborne starting sixth on a partially reversed grid for the finale, a third win was looking unlikely. Gary Mitchell led initially from Walton, while Osborne was already third by the end of the opening lap. The safety car then made an appearance, and from the green flag Osborne tried to go around Mitchell's outside at Redgate. As he ran wide on the wet track, he dropped to seventh, with Parkin up to second and Walton duelling with Ryan for third.

With Walton in the Redgate gravel a lap later, Osborne was back to third. He quickly picked off Parkin, before snatching Mitchell's lead into Coppice

Weddell lands the Mini crown

KNOCKHILL
SMRC
31 OCTOBER

Knockhill was run in the reverse direction for the Scottish Motor Racing Club's season finale, but there was no reversal in fortunes for Michael Weddell, who sealed the Scottish Mini Cooper Cup crown in the opening race.

The track was damp and slippery after morning rain and the Scottish Minis opened with the two championships running together, but split on the grid. The Cooper S R53 cars started ahead and Andrew Lamont won both races. But the less powerful Cooper Cup cars had three different winners.

Neil Hose passed long-time race-one leader Weddell on the penultimate lap, but Weddell stayed in second and won his first championship title. Hose also led race two until lap four of 12, before Craig Blake grabbed the advantage and held off Hose and Dylan O'Donnell to win.

The third race featured only Cooper cars and the top six finishers were reversed on the grid. From the second row, Chad Little stormed into the lead, but he spun halfway round the lap, handing O'Donnell the place. But Little was on a charge, recovering to lead by lap six, and then pulling clear to win. O'Donnell and Hose battled over second, until Hose went off at the hairpin on the last lap, so Gordon Long took third.

The Scottish Fiesta ST Cup was



dominated by three guest drivers. Multiple saloon champion Oly Mortimer took two good wins with the returning 2013 Fiesta ST champion George Orr second both times. Orr dropped to fourth in race one, then got back to second after battling past Mini JCW racer Liam Lambert, who lost third on the final tour to new champion



with a lap to go to complete his impressive hat-trick. Mitchell was runner-up, while Parkin managed to hold off Rudd for his second podium of the day.

No-one could live with Mark Charteris's Clubmans Sports Prototype pace. His Mallock Mk21 had already started to build a substantial lead over poleman Mathieu Gauthier-Thornton's Phantom, which was quicker than the top CSP1 cars in the wet qualifying, in race one when the safety car came out for four laps. From the green flag, Charteris was soon clear again, with Gauthier-Thornton and champion Steve Dickens's Mallock escaping too, while Peter Richings led a three-way fight for fourth. As the lead trio held station to the flag, Clive Wood's Mallock hit the front of the pursuers from lap seven of nine.

The second race was red-flagged just before a torrential downpour and it was a lights-to-flag victory for Charteris again. Dickens was second early on, with Richings

taking Steve Chaplin (Phantom) for third. But Wood recovered from a first-lap off to claim a late second, aided by Dickens pitting with brake problems. Richings was third.

There was another double winner in the Elise Trophy, with Jason McInulty reigning supreme. He led from the opening lap of race one but, behind him, there was a duel between David Alexander and Alex Ball, split by just 0.218s at the flag, with Mick Edwards a solitary fourth.

Matthias Radestock was in charge in race two, but he couldn't stop McInulty's charge through the field. From 10th on the grid, he led into Redgate on lap nine of 12, heading home Radestock, Edwards and Mark Yates.

Chris Bassett's Peugeot 306 GTI led from the start of the first Track Attack race, but he was almost caught by David Clark (Renault 5 Turbo). Bassett pitted from the lead of race two, leaving Andrew Neal's 106 with the victory spoils by inches from Clark.

PETER SCHERER



Steven Gray. Mortimer again got clear in race two, while Orr ran with Lambert on his bumper. But Lambert was disqualified post-race for overtaking during a safety car period, promoting Gray to third.

John Kinmond led from pole in the first Scottish Classics race in his Rover SD1. But Shonny Paterson was on the move in his

Triumph TR8, demoting the Porsche 911 of Adam Bernard on lap two, before powering past the Rover for the lead as they exited the hairpin mid-race. Second for Kinmond still gave him the championship, while Andrew Graham put another TR8 third.

Race two followed a similar pattern: Kinmond again led from the start and

WEEKEND WINNERS



DONINGTON PARK FOCUS CUP

Races 1, 2 & 3 Jamie Osborne

CLUBMANS SPORTS PROTOTYPE

Races 1 & 2 Mark Charteris (Mallock Mk21)

ELISE TROPHY

Races 1 & 2 Jason McInulty (above)

TRACK ATTACK

Race 1 Chris Bassett (Peugeot 306 GTI)

Race 2 Andrew Neal (Peugeot 106 GTI)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

KNOCKHILL

SCOTTISH MINIS

Races 1 & 2 Andrew Lamont (Cooper S R53)

Race 3 Chad Little (Cooper)

SCOTTISH FIESTA ST CUP

Races 1 & 2 Oly Mortimer

SCOTTISH CLASSIC SPORTS AND SALOONS

Races 1 & 2 Shonny Paterson (Triumph TR8)

SCOTTISH C1 CUP

Races 1 & 2 Sam Corson

For full results visit: speedhive.mylaps.com

Paterson outbraked Bernard at the first corner to chase Kinmond. They ran nose to tail for a couple of laps, before the Rover slid wide exiting the hairpin. Paterson dived past in the TR8, and then pulled away. Kinmond kept second despite a late challenge from Philip Russell's BMW 3 Series.

Scottish C1 Cup rookie Sam Corson took two fine wins. In race one, he led home Kyle Nisbet, Ryan Smith and reigning champion Ross Dunn, with 1.4 seconds covering the top four. Corson took the lead on lap two in the second contest from Nisbet, eventually winning from Smith. Dunn ran a close fourth behind Calum Conway and retained the title. His main rival for the crown, Dan Martin, put in an heroic drive from 16th to fifth but it was not enough.

KEVIN PICK

HOW AUTOSPORT'S NATIONAL DRIVER RANKINGS ARE SHAPING UP

There's just a handful of events remaining in the national racing season, but it's still very much all to play for in the battle to secure the most wins in 2021

MARCUS SIMMONS AND STEPHEN LICKORISH



The arrival of the knockout Formula Ford 1600 contests is a sure sign that the national racing season is approaching its conclusion. The drama of these traditional end-of-year staples is one of the many hints that the current campaign is drawing to a close, a final bout of excitement before much of UK motorsport goes into hibernation. They coincide with depressing features of this early November period, such as the clocks having just gone back and darkness descending ever earlier – and never-ending Christmas TV adverts! But, despite the battle to top Autosport's National Driver Rankings entering its final throes and there being just eight race events scheduled in the remainder of 2021, it's sure to provide some late-season entertainment.

It's far from certain who will end the year in top spot and this coming weekend is set to play a pivotal role in determining who gets that honour. The current top two

drivers are both due to be in action – and both are set to have a plethora of chances to add to their win tallies. Historic Formula Ford ace Cam Jackson has entered the Walter Hayes Trophy at Silverstone in a Van Diemen RF90 and is targeting Janet Cesar Trophy glory. Depending on his path through the competition, he could have up to five chances to earn further victories

and secure top spot on the leaderboard.

But his closest rival Miles Rudman, with one win fewer than Jackson's table-topping 17, could also boost his total this weekend with the Legends finale at Brands Hatch offering him six potential opportunities to enjoy a victorious end to the season. Given he took five wins in one weekend at Donington Park back in August,





anything is possible.

Jackson is particularly keen to end the year on top having missed out by the narrowest of margins last season. Two wins for Gary Prebble (who is 23rd currently this year, if you're interested) in a December 750 Motor Club meeting took them both to 15 wins, but Prebble emerged triumphant because there were 0.6 more

"JACKSON MISSED OUT BY THE NARROWEST OF MARGINS LAST YEAR"

cars on average for his victories, compared to Jackson's. And the abacus is likely to be out again after this weekend.

For those whose attention may have been elsewhere in the past 18 months, Autosport decided to relaunch this contest last year »

LEADERBOARD		LATEST	AUTOSPORT	NATIONAL	DRIVER	RANKINGS	2021
POS	DRIVER (CAR)						
		OVERALL WINS	CLASS WINS				TOTAL
1	Cam Jackson (Winkelmann WDF2/Brabham BT2)	17	0				17
2	Miles Rudman (Legends 34 Ford Coupe)	16	0				16
3	Michael Cullen (Stryker/Ford Fiesta ST/Lotus Cortina)	12	3				15
4	Stefano Leaney (Dallara F317)	14	0				14
5	James Little (Ferrari F355 Challenge/Ferrari 458 Challenge/Citroen C1)	13	0				13
6	Scott Parkin (Volkswagen Golf TDI/Ford Focus 2.0 TDCi Zetec S/Ford Ka)	10	3				13
7	Ben Short (Mazda MX 5 Mk1)	12	0				12
8	Alistair Camp (Honda Civic EP3)	12	0				12
9	Nic Grindrod (Citroen C1)	12	0				12
10	Charlie Hand (Citroen Saxo VTR)	12	0				12
11	Ollie Neaves (MGB GTV8)	12	0				12
12	Lewis Thompson (Caterham 310R)	12	0				12
13	Dan Gore (Jedi Mk6)	11	1				12
14	Rod Birley (Ford Escort Cosworth WRC)	11	1				12
15	Andy Smith (March 783/March 742)	10	2				12
16	Barry McMahon (Alfa Romeo 156/Alfa Romeo Giulietta)	10	2				12
17	Harry Senior (Caterham 7 SigMax)	9	3				12
18	Jon Woolfitt (Spire GTR)	9	3				12
19	David Drinkwater (BMW Compact)	0	12				12
20	Sam Neary (Mercedes-AMG GT3)	11	0				11
21	Steven Dailly (BMW E36 Compact 318Ti/Ginetta G40 GT5)	11	0				11
22	John Mickel (Legends 34 Ford Coupe)	11	0				11
23	Gary Prebble (Honda Civic EG/SEAT Leon Cupra 20vT)	8	3				11
24	Dave Griffin (BMW M3 E36)	6	5				11
25	John Davison (Lotus Elan S1/Lotus Elan 26R/Lotus Elite)	4	7				11
26	Michael Winkworth (Mini Se7en S)	0	11				11
27	Richard Neary (Mercedes-AMG GT3)	10	0				10
28	Sam Smith (Mazda MX-5 Mk3/Mazda MX-5 Mk1)	10	0				10
29	Adam Shepherd (Honda Civic Type R)	10	0				10
30	Brad Sheehan (BMW E46 M3)	10	0				10
31	Oliver White (Medina Sport JL17K)	10	0				10
32	Shane Murphy (SEAT Leon)	10	0				10
33	Jim Larkham (Radical PR06)	10	0				10
34	James Harridge (Maverick Vee)	5	5				10
35	Joshua Jackson (McLaren 570S GT4)	0	10				10
36	Marc Warren (Ginetta G40 Cup)	0	10				10
37	Niall Bradley (BMW E46 M3)	9	0				9
38	Sam Kirkpatrick (MG ZR190/MGB)	9	0				9
39	Steve McDermid (MG ZR170)	9	0				9
40	Dave Cockell (Ford Escort Cosworth)	9	0				9
41	Paul Brydon (BMW M3 Solution F)	9	0				9
42	Alex Walker (Spectrum 011)	9	0				9
43	Jamie Blake (Mini Cooper R53)	9	0				9
44	James Cottingham (Jaguar E-type/Shelby Cobra/Lister-Jaguar Costin/Tojeiro-Jaguar/Ford GT40)	8	1				9
45	Aaron Cooke (Toyota MR2 Roadster)	8	1				9
46	Andrew Jordan (Mini Miglia/Morris Mini Cooper S/Studebaker Lark Daytona 500/Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe/Austin GT40)	7	2				9
47	Ben Pearson (BMW E46 330Ci)	0	9				9
48	Nic Carlton-Smith (Kieft FJ)	0	9				9
49	Leon Morrell (Radical SR3)	0	9				9
50	Simon Orange (Ginetta G55)	0	9				9
51	Josh Steed (Ginetta G40 GT5)	8	0				8
52	Simon Clark (Porsche Cayman S)	8	0				8
53	Graham Fennymore (Reynard SF81)	8	0				8



as part of our continued commitment to promote the world of national motorsport and the rankings are essentially the same as the Golden Helmet feature that has appeared in these pages on and off over the past few decades.

The premise is simple. Every overall race win on a UK or Irish circuit is counted equally, whether that is Lewis Hamilton's Formula 1 British Grand Prix triumph or the victor of a Citroen C1 endurance race at Oulton Park. And the winner is the person with the most victories at the end of the year. Class wins also enter the mix, but only for categories where the divisions feature different car characteristics rather than being for rookies, for example. We also stipulate that there must be

a minimum of six starters in a class for the win to count. And, as was witnessed last year, the average grid size for a driver's win determines the order when two or more have achieved the same.

Apart from that, there are no other rules and a top 50 table is produced each week on [autosport.com](https://www.autosport.com), charting the latest key position changes. But, this week, we've got a treat as the table has doubled in size to give the top 100 drivers as things stand. These are listed across these four pages for you to try to find yourself or any drivers you know.

Jackson has led the way ever since the first table of 2021 was produced, almost two months into the season at the end of May. However, despite picking up

victories in Historic and Classic FF1600 and Formula Junior, he has not contested a full campaign this year. His mid-season lull has therefore allowed others to close in, most notably Rudman, to leave the current delicately poised situation.

Jackson's closest challenger was initially Scott Parkin (currently sixth), who has achieved victories across a variety of series and cars – including in the Focus Cup, Trackday Championship and EnduroKa. Next up was BMW E36 M3 pilot Dave Griffin, who roared towards the top of the table thanks to Classic Sports Car Club and Classic Touring Car Racing Club triumphs but has since dropped to 24th.

Griffin and Civic Cup champion Alistair Camp (currently eighth) then had a spell



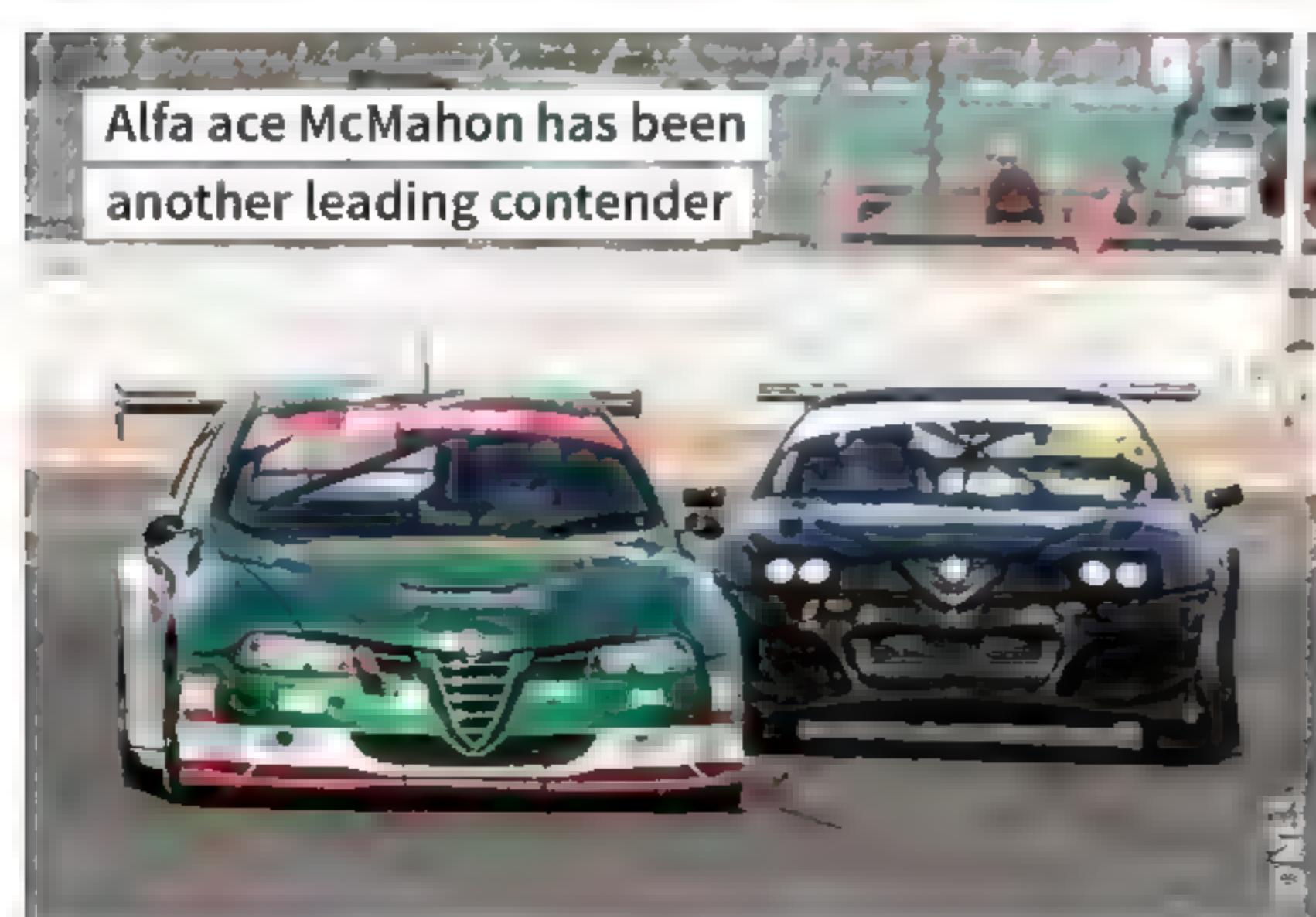


**“THE PREMISE IS SIMPLE.
EVERY OVERALL WIN ON
A UK OR IRISH CIRCUIT
IS COUNTED EQUALLY”**

of continually trading second place, before Rudman took the spot for the first time in August. Current third-place driver Michael Cullen, the Irish Stryker champion and Lotus Cortina racer, also briefly held the runner-up spot in September.

Other drivers to enjoy stints in the top three include Mazda MX-5 star Ben Short (now seventh), CityCar Cup champion Nic Grindrod (ninth at present), MG BCV8 dominator Ollie Neaves (11th), Alfa ace Barry McMahon (now down in 16th) and F3 Cup victor Stefano Leaney (fourth).

There were actually no changes in the top 43 after last weekend's racing – however there's still plenty of time for the order to alter. But we have still got a while to wait to see the final leaderboard. With the traditional Plum Pudding meeting back on the Boxing Day schedule, the definitive 2021 table won't be produced until January (accompanied by a feature about the winning driver). And that's certainly something to look forward to during the post-Christmas blues. **W**



LEADERBOARD		LATEST AUTOSPORT NATIONAL DRIVER RANKINGS 2021	OVERALL WINS	CLASS WINS	TOTAL
POS	DRIVER (CAR)				
54	Paul Rose (Saker RAPX51-500)		8	0	8
55	Stephen Nuttall (Caterham 420R/Caterham Supersport)		8	0	8
56	Tom Robinson (Jaguar XJR6)		8	0	8
57	John Kinmond (Rover 3500)		8	0	8
58=	Scott Mittell (Mittell MC-41RR)		8	0	8
58=	Ben Powney (Locost Ma7da/Jedi)		8	0	8
60	Angus Whiteside (Ginetta G56 GTA)		8	0	8
61	Mark Charteris (Mallock U2 Mk20/21)		8	0	8
62	Stewart Black (Legends Ford Coupe)		8	0	8
63	Deagen Fairclough (Ford Fiesta ST)		8	0	8
64	Theo Edgerton (Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 Clubsport)		8	0	8
65	Robert Barrable (Legends Ford Coupe)		8	0	8
66	Paul Roddison (Mazda MX-5 Mk4)		8	0	8
67	Matt Bell (Radical SR3)		7	1	8
68	Cam Walton (Toyota MR2 Mk2)		1	7	8
69	Michelle Hayward (Mallock U2 Mk23)		0	8	8
70	Richard Forber (Porsche Boxster S)		0	8	8
71	Carl Powell (Peugeot 206 GTi Cup)		0	8	8
72	Ben Stiles (Van Diemen RF82)		0	8	8
73	Barry Webb (Mallock U2 Mk16)		0	8	8
74	Jack Brewer (Mazda MX-5 Mk1)		7	0	7
75	Simon Baker (BMW 1 Series)		7	0	7
76	Aston Millar (Ginetta G40 Junior)		7	0	7
77	Tom Stoten (Gunn TS11)		7	0	7
78	Callum Voisin (Ginetta G40 Junior)		7	0	7
79	William Plant (Morgan +8)		7	0	7
80	Mike Williams (Rover Metro GTi)		7	0	7
81	George Turiccki (SHP Pickup)		7	0	7
82	Adam Smalley (Ginetta G55 GT4)		7	0	7
83	Zak O'Sullivan (Tatuus BF3-020)		7	0	7
84	Alex Cursley (Hyundai Coupe)		7	0	7
85	Ryan Yarrow (Spire GT3S)		7	0	7
86	Ron Cumming (Nemesis Kit Car)		7	0	7
87	Shaun Traynor (Toyota MR2 Roadster)		6	1	7
88	Jamie Boot (TVR Griffith)		6	1	7
89	Endaf Owens (Mini Miglia/Austin Mini Cooper S)		6	1	7
90	Pete Sparrow (Citroen 2CV)		6	1	7
91	Jordan Harrison (Lola T540E)		6	1	7
92	Wayne Marrs (Ferrari F355 Challenge/Ferrari 488 Challenge)		6	1	7
93	David Shead (BMW Compact 318)		5	2	7
94	Oliver Bryant (Morgan +8/Tojeiro-Jaguar/ACC Cobra/Porsche 904 Carrera GTS/Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe/Jaguar E-type FHC)		5	2	7
95	Clive Wood (Mallock U2 Mk23)		5	2	7
96	Edd Giddings (BMW Z4)		5	2	7
97	Paul Cook (BMW E46 M3/Toyota MR2 Mk2)		4	3	7
98	James McCall (Caterham 7 Sigma 135)		4	3	7
99	Jason West (BMW E46 M3)		4	3	7
100	Jamie Ellwood (Caterham 7 Sigma 150)		3	4	7

All car races in UK and Ireland are included except qualification/repechage, consolation and handicap races. No races in other countries. Class wins are only counted when there are at least six starters in the class. Only classes divided by car characteristics are included. Classes divided by driver characteristics such as ability, professional status, age, experience (for example rookie or Pro-Am classes) are not included. Where there is a tie, overall wins take precedence. Where there is still a tie, average grid size for a driver's wins determines the order.

JOHANSSON HEADLINES RAC ART EXHIBITION

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB ART OF MOTORING EXHIBITION

Stefan Johansson is no stranger to the limelight. After all, he drove for Ferrari and McLaren in the 1980s during his Formula 1 career, and took overall glory at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1997. But it was a different environment where the Swede was the centre of attention this week, with several pieces of his artwork on display for the Royal Automobile Club's Art of Motoring exhibition.

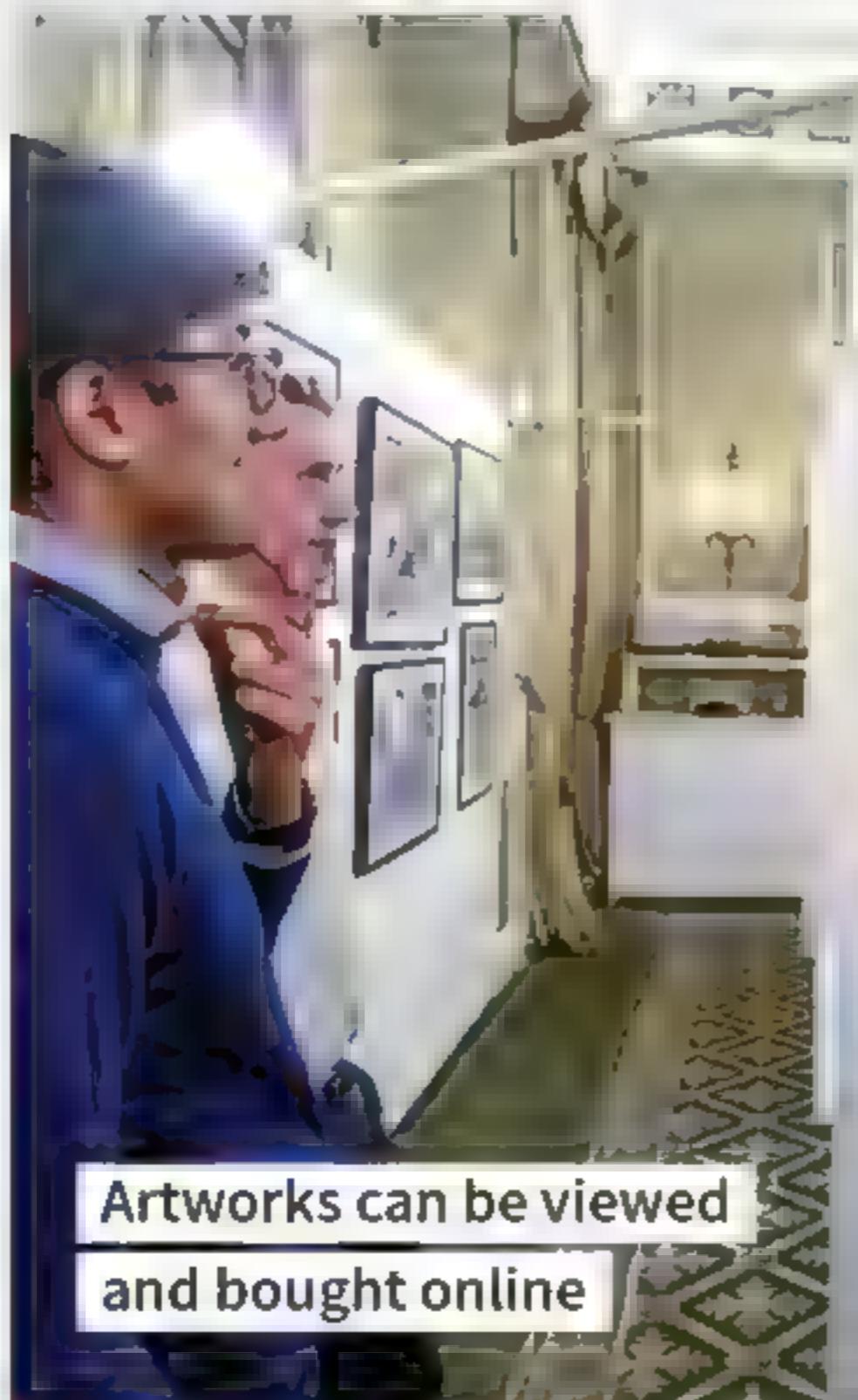
The annual event was first staged in 2015, with last year's exhibition held virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. But in 2021, 16 leading artists have been showcasing their work as part of London Motor Week.

Johansson's passion for painting took on a new meaning following the death of his close friend, fellow F1 driver Elio de Angelis, in a testing accident at Paul Ricard in 1986, but his love for art had long taken root.

"I had an interest in art since I was very little — my grandfather was a painter and I used to stand two, three or four years old watching him when he was painting," says the 12-time grand prix podium finisher.

"And then when I started earning some money in racing I started collecting a few bits and pieces here and there on my travels. But it wasn't really until Elio had his accident, that kind of hit me. Elio and I were really close friends and it was kind of an outlet I guess to just kind of get over and process the whole thing. I didn't know why really because I had no interest in doing anything on my own before then, but it got me hooked and I've been doing it on and off ever since."

Johansson's artwork unsurprisingly takes inspiration from the world of motorsport, with his variety of works including some abstracts and portraits, but the 65-year-old has been keen to avoid the "cliche"



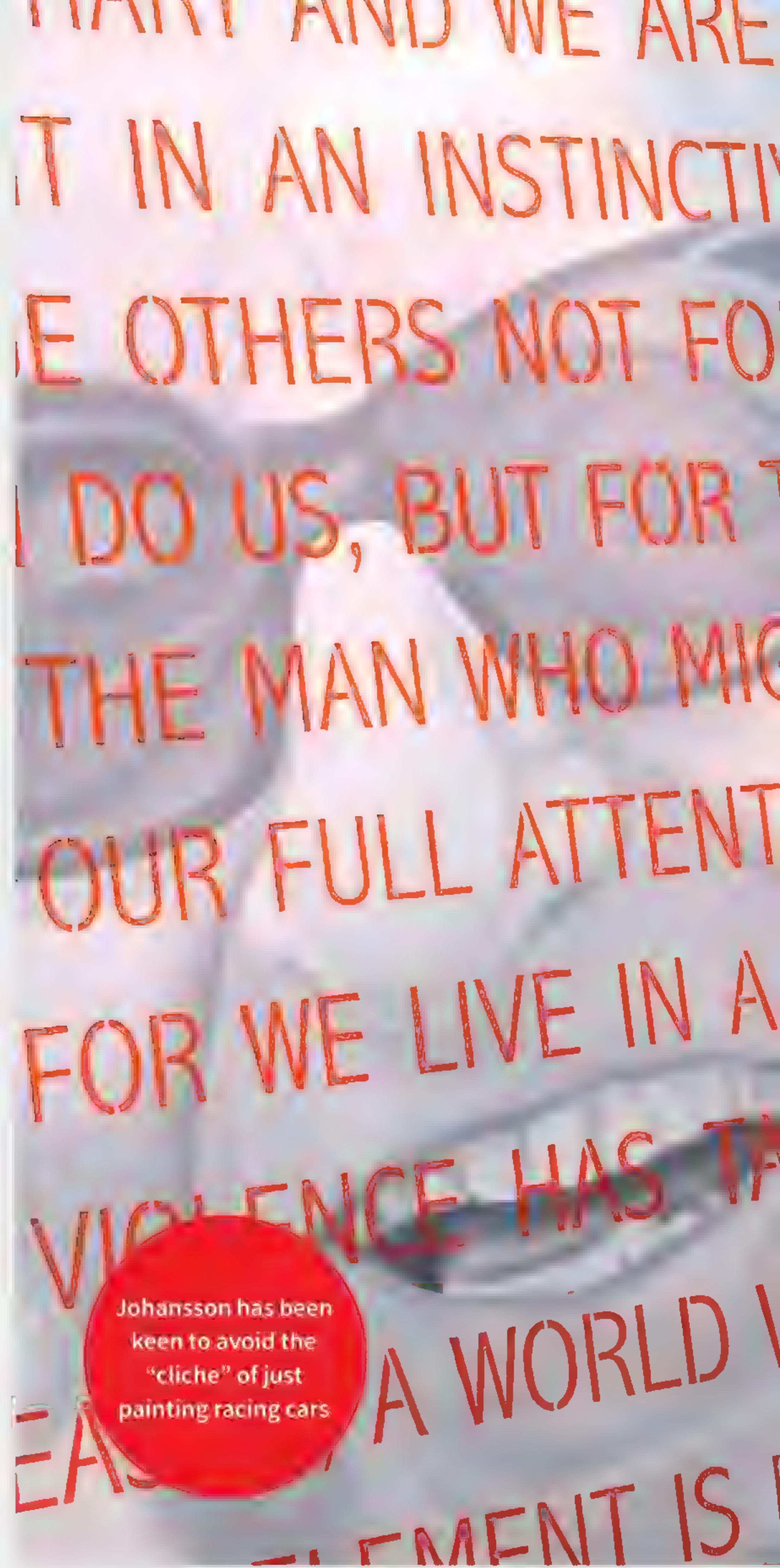
Artworks can be viewed and bought online



MARK LEWIS PHOTOGRAPHY



MARK LEWIS PHOTOGRAPHY

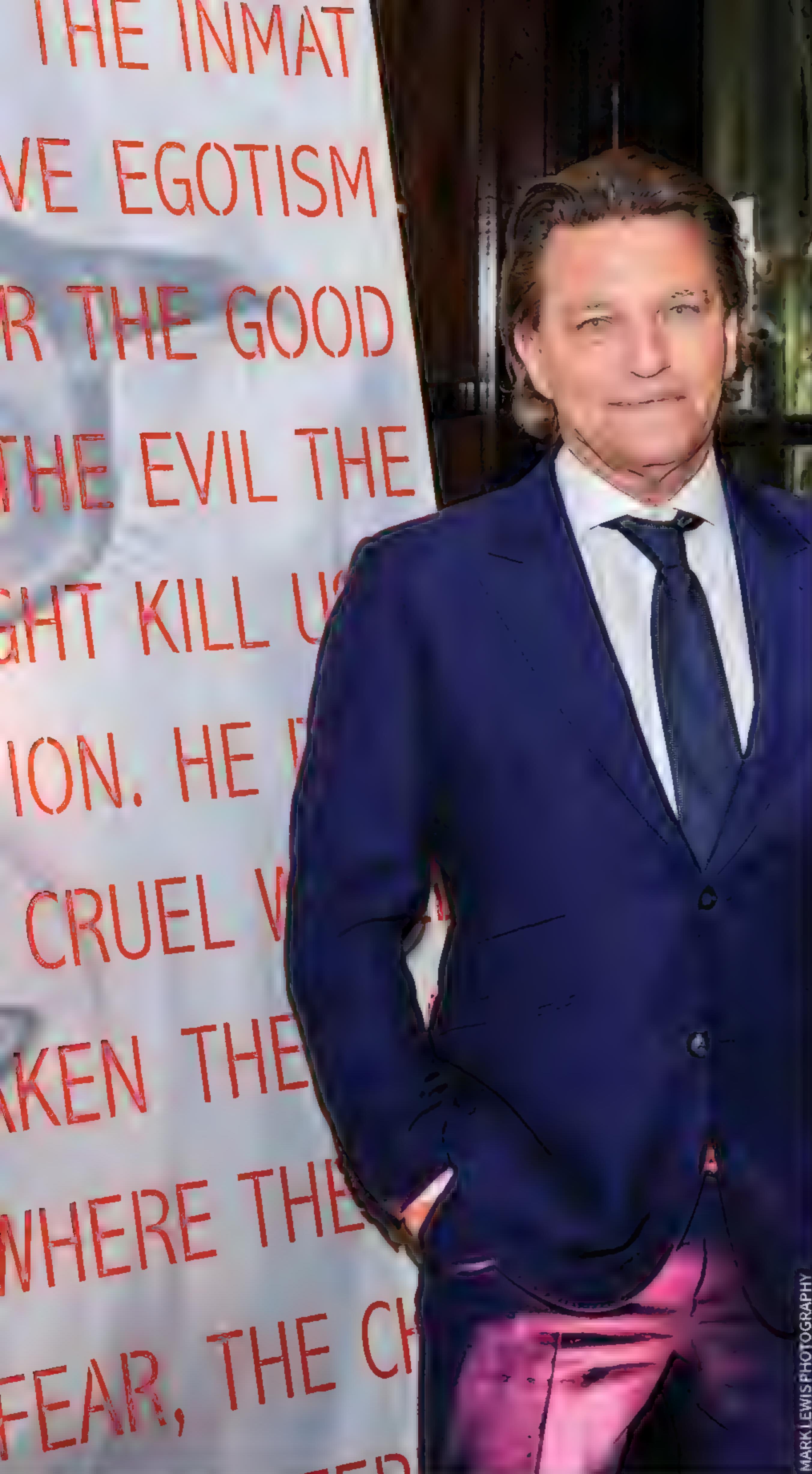


Johansson has been keen to avoid the "cliche" of just painting racing cars

of merely painting racing cars. "The abstracts, it's more just inspiration from various tracks around the world, that triggers something," he says. "I named them after different sections of different corners, or different tracks around the world."

"I didn't really want to paint cars before because I felt it was a little bit too cliche for me. But I think I've found a style, kind of impressionism, pointillism, so it harps back to some history of art, let's say, a unique style at least, that's different from most other car paintings."

Another newcomer to this year's exhibit is Paul Howse who, until recently, worked on the



design team for McLaren's road cars. Also new to the exhibition are Ian Bilbey and Brian James, while other artists include Tim Layzell, Barry Rowe, John Ketchell, Paul Dove and Roy Putt, plus sculptors Johnny Ambrose and Robin Bark. Other regulars include watercolourist Neil Collins, Adam Gompertz, Martin Tomlinson and Simon Britnell.

While each artist's process is different, Johansson can spend more than a month on a particular piece of work, not including the research that goes on beforehand, looking into the lives of individuals such as Enzo Ferrari and Bernie Ecclestone.

"I only base the art on the quote that I find, so I read a lot," he says. "Sometimes I might see something and it just pops out at you. That would be great, so then I start researching the person and then I make the art after that. It's a bit like if you write the lyrics before you put the music to the song."

To many, Johansson's artistic passion was not known, even among his friends, because "it was purely something I did privately, for my pleasure", but the chance to exhibit at the RAC and showcase his abilities is "an honour".

The exhibit is open to VIPs and guests only until Saturday, but the general public can view, and purchase, all the displayed pieces via theartofmotoring.co.uk

STEFAN MACKLEY

FINISHING STRAIGHT

THIS WEEK WITH WILL BUXTON
stream exclusively on **motorsport.tv** **LIVE**

THIS WEEK WITH WILL BUXTON
Episode 11 of This Week with Will Buxton features Autosport's F1 reporter Luke Smith as the pair discuss MotoGP world champion, as well as interviews with IndyCar champion Alex Palou, Tarran Mackenzie and Allard Kalf. [Go to uk.motorsport.tv](http://uk.motorsport.tv)

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Mexican Grand Prix

F1 World Championship

Round 18/22

Mexico City, Mexico

7 November

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1855

TV Highlights Sky Sports F1, Sun 2300, Channel 4, Sun 2335

World Endurance Championship

Round 6/6

Sakhir, Bahrain

6 November

Livestream on motorsport.tv, Fri 1410, Sat 1030

TV Live Eurosport 2, Sat 1045

World Touring Car Cup

Round 7/8

Adria, Italy

7 November

Livestream on motorsport.tv, Sat 1430, Sun 0900, Eurosport 2, Sun 0900, Sun 1100

ADAC GT Masters

Round 7/7

Nurburgring, Germany

6-7 November

Australian Supercars

Round 9/12

Sydney Motorsport Park, Australia

6-7 November

TV Live BT Sport 3, Sat 0830, Sun 0445, BT Sport 1, Sun 0815

Super GT

Round 7/8

Motegi, Japan

7 November

Livestream on motorsport.tv, Sat 0520, Sun 0400

NASCAR Cup Series

Round 36/36

Phoenix, USA

7 November

TV Live Premier Sports 2, Sun 1930

NASCAR Xfinity Series

Round 33/33

Phoenix, USA

7 November

TV Live Premier Sports 2, Sun 0000

MotoGP

Round 17/18

Algarve, Portugal

7 November

TV Live BT Sport 2, Sun 1230

UK MOTORSPORT

Silverstone HSCC

6-7 November

Walter Hayes Trophy, Allcomers, Monoposto, Production Endurance

Donington Park BRSCC

6 November

Fun Cup, ST-XR Challenge

Brands Hatch BARC

6-7 November

Allcomers, British Trucks, Hyundai Coupe Cup, Junior Saloons, Legends, Pickups

Lydden Hill

6-7 November

British Rallycross Championship





FINISHING STRAIGHT

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Phil Hill (#4 Ferrari 156) and team-mate Wolfgang von Trips fight for the lead of the 1961 Belgian Grand Prix. The Italian manufacturer dominated proceedings at Spa, qualifying 1-2-3-5 (Hill, von Trips, Olivier Gendebien and Richie Ginther, with the Cooper-Climax T53 of John Surtees crashing the party in fourth). Graham Hill (BRM-Climax P48/57) rocketed into the lead at the start of the race, but before the end of the first lap the four Ferraris were back ahead. Home hero Gendebien, who was driving a yellow 156 on loan from the factory squad, led briefly, but the lesser output of his car's older-spec V6 meant his moment of glory was short-lived, and it was Hill and von Trips who diced up front for the bulk of the 30-lap race distance, the American edging it at the flag by 0.7 seconds. Spa rookie Ginther, whose pace and confidence increased throughout the race to the extent that he set fastest lap, was third, 19.5s adrift, and Gendebien completed a Prancing Horse podium-plus-one, 45.6s down.



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HAVE-A-GO HERO

When drivers crop up in unexpected places

LUCAS LUHR

The 2013 Sonoma IndyCar race is best remembered for Scott Dixon contacting a wheel carried by a member of Will Power's pitcrew, who was tossed skywards. But for sportscar all-rounder Lucas Luhr, it's also significant as the occasion of his only US open-wheel start.

The then-34-year-old was offered a Sarah Fisher Hartman Racing entry by Honda Performance Development as a reward for his efforts in the American Le Mans Series with HPD's LMP1 car, in which he was set to add a second consecutive title together with Klaus Graf. But Luhr hadn't raced at Sonoma since 2004 in a Porsche GT car, or campaigned a single-seater since his Formula 3 days in 1998, so had a lot of unlearning to do, not least since the spec Dallara DW12 had "no brakes, no downforce against the LMP1 car" with its carbon discs. "I remember braking first time towards the chicane; I completely went straight!" he says.

Luhr was also surprised by the physicality of the car, telling his team upon leaving the pits: "There's something wrong with the steering, I think it's broken." I couldn't believe how hard it was! It was fine with the

rest of the body, but my arms and fingers, I thought they were gonna fall off!"

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Luhr qualified last in the 25-car field, but kept out of trouble and worked his way through the pack before his engine failed. This put paid to the chance of pulling double duty across the IndyCar/ALMS event at Baltimore the following week, since Honda needed to keep its spare engine in reserve for title challenger Dixon. "But anyhow, I enjoyed myself," he says.

After words of encouragement in the paddock from Roger Penske, his team boss from his 2006 ALMS LMP2 title-winning year – "He said, 'Hey, you did very good, boy'" – Luhr entertained the prospect of a full season in 2014, but decided that ovals were off the menu after Dan Wheldon's fatal accident in 2011 at Las Vegas. "If I'd been 10 years younger, I would have gone for it," says Luhr. "But at that time I didn't feel really comfortable, I was just not willing to take the risk."

He instead joined BMW, adding victory in the Spa 24 Hours to his CV in 2015. Today, Luhr co-owns Swiss-based customer racing team LiLaC Rennsport.

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

Will it get spicy in Mexico?

FIVE TO GO FOR HAMILTON VERSUS VERSTAPPEN



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